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THE HARP OF LIFE

*"Love took up the Harp of Life and smote
on all the chords with might!
Smote the chord of Self that, trembling,
passed in music out of sight."*

BY J. HARTLEY MANNERS

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A Comedy in Three Acts



LAURETTE TAYLOR AS "SYLVIA"

THE HARP OF LIFE

A PLAY

BY

J. HARTLEY MANNERS



NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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1921

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no 1

TO
THE ORIGINATOR OF THE PART OF
SYLVIA: LAUBETTE TAYLOR
I GRATEFULLY DEDICATE THIS PLAY
THE AUTHOR

[Reproduction of Original Programme]

*Produced at the Globe Theatre, New York,
on Monday, November 27th, 1916.*

Klaw & Erlanger and George C. Tyler

Present

LAURETTE TAYLOR
IN
THE HARP OF LIFE

A Play in Three Acts
BY J. HARTLEY MANNERS

“Love took up the Harp of Life and smote on all the
chords with might!
Smote the chord of Self that, trembling, passed in music
out of sight.”

Produced under the personal direction of the Author

THE PEOPLE OF THE PLAY

SYLVIA	<i>Miss Laurette Taylor</i>
ZEILA VORONA	<i>Miss Gail Kane</i>
ELIZABETH HOOD	<i>Miss Ffolliot Paget</i>
OLIVE HOOD	<i>Miss Lynn Fontanne</i>
MARSHALL BROOKE	<i>Mr. Philip Merivale</i>
LEONARD BROOKE	<i>Mr. Dion Titheradge</i>
GODFREY SAXON	<i>Mr. Frank Kemble Cooper</i>

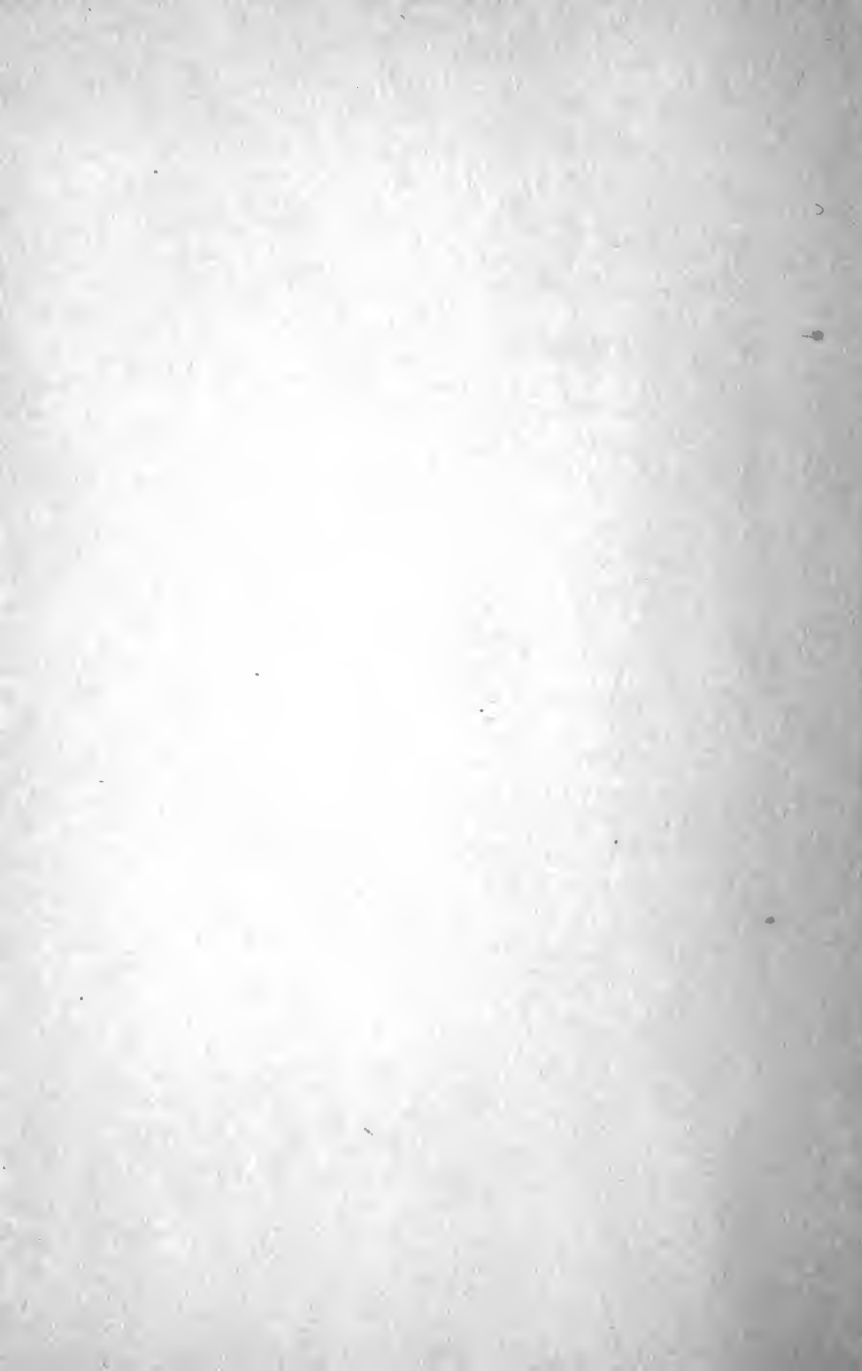
The First Act — BOYHOOD

The Second Act — ADOLESCENCE

The Third Act — MANHOOD

The incidents of the first two acts occur in the home of the Brooke family: the last act at Mrs. Vorona's residence.

The entire action of the play happens within twenty-four hours.



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THE PEOPLE OF THE PLAY

SYLVIA

ZEILA VORONA

ELIZABETH HOOD

OLIVE HOOD

MARSHALL BROOKE

LEONARD BROOKE

GODFREY SAXON

The incidents of the first two acts occur in the home of the Brooke family; the last act at Mrs. Vorona's residence.

The entire action of the play happens within twenty-four hours.

Written 1916

THE HARP OF LIFE

THE HARP OF LIFE

ACT I: BOYHOOD

A large, well-furnished room in the country home of the BROOKE family. The colouring is pink and grey. As you look at the stage you see two large windows on your left at the back of the room opening on to a roomy porch. Next to the windows to your left is a door leading to the other rooms of the house. On your right at the back of the room is another door leading into the entrance-hall.

The furnishing of the room is simple, comfortable and tasteful. The colour-scheme of pink and grey has been carefully and completely emphasised.

It is afternoon in early summer. The sun is flooding in through the open windows.

A telephone-bell can be heard ringing for some seconds before the curtain rises. When it ascends the room is empty.

You then see that the telephone is on a small table at the back. It continues to ring fitfully. After a while,

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as though the operator at the other end despaired of attracting attention, it stops.

Through the open windows can be heard the sound of several voices punctuated with hearty laughter.

On to the porch and into the room energetically walks MARSHALL BROOKE, a tall, studious, somewhat grave man, a little over forty, followed by his son LEONARD, a bright, alert handsome boy of nineteen. Both are in riding-kit: heated, somewhat breathless and evidently enjoying a very recent humorous incident.

The boy turns on the porch and laughs at someone in the near distance. BROOKE throws his cap and whip onto a seat and joins his son, laughing heartily and mopping himself generously with a handkerchief. They both look off at the unseen butt of their shafts of humour.

LEONARD

You did pick a soft spot to fall on.

BROOKE

And you fell very gracefully.

LEONARD

You mustn't be discouraged. He is quite easy to sit on when you understand horses.

BROOKE

I'll show you in the morning. Poor Sylvia.

LEONARD

Poor, dusty mother.

[Onto the porch comes SYLVIA, a slim, graceful, sympathetic woman of thirty-six, looking many years

ACT I: BOYHOOD

younger. She is wearing a well-fitting riding-habit which throws into relief her trim figure and girlish face. She is extremely dusty all down the right side of the habit and the right sleeve. She is straightening a dent out of her hard felt riding-hat, is somewhat red from exertion, nervous from a fall, and a little irritated at being chaffed.]

SYLVIA

[Aims a blow at LEONARD who runs nimbly into the room. She follows him.] I suppose you have never had a tumble?

LEONARD

Never, since I left riding-school.

SYLVIA

[Turns to her husband who is chuckling insanely as he looks at his wife.] I don't see anything particularly funny in it.

BROOKE

You would have if you could have seen yourself. It was the neatest thing in tumbles outside of a circus.

LEONARD

This is what you did. Look. *[Gives an imitation, with the aid of a chair, of SYLVIA riding at a gate, the horse stopping and the fair rider going clear over the horse's head and falling on her right side. He matches word with action.]* Gee up! Over, lad! Heavens! Down! *[Looks up from the floor at his father, rubbing*

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his elbow on which he had fallen heavily in his zeal for portrayal.] Eh, father?

BROOKE

Pretty good. Sylvia was more graceful and chose a softer spot.

SYLVIA

Only a *male* animal would do such a thing. Throw a woman. Beast. He shied at the bushes.

BROOKE

Poor "Gypsy." Such a mild animal, too.

LEONARD

What did you do to him?

SYLVIA

Nothing. He simply wouldn't jump. Stopped dead—and off I came. [*The two men laugh heartily.*] If it's so amusing I wonder you don't go to hospitals for entertainment. The *accident*-wards for preference.

LEONARD

[*Quizzingly.*] Do you think it's age, father?

BROOKE

Yes. And *weight*.

LEONARD

She's losing her "hands."

BROOKE

All women do after a certain age.

LEONARD

She can't judge distance any more.

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BROOKE

Weight will handicap any horse.

LEONARD

Poor *old* mother.

BROOKE

Poor *heavy* old lady.

[*Father and son sigh heavily.*]

[*SYLVIA gives them a scornful look as she removes her gauntlets and puts them with her hat on a table.*]

LEONARD

[*Dancing gleefully and mischievously.*] She's got the needle! Mother's got the needle!

BROOKE

Dear, dear. Temper. Really.

LEONARD

This *is* fun. Fancy being angry because a quiet old horse tossed her!

SYLVIA

I'm not angry and he's not a quiet old horse.

LEONARD

I believe she's going to cry.

BROOKE

Oh, my boy, the best of us have to give in to advancing years and tonnage.

LEONARD

Never mind, mother. We'll get you a nice, docile old *mare*.

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BROOKE

Driving is safer—if someone else holds the reins.

SYLVIA

Do you really think I couldn't make him go over that stupid little fence?

LEONARD

I *know* you couldn't.

SYLVIA

[*To her husband.*] And you?

BROOKE

Well, my dear! You *didn't*.

[*SYLVIA goes quickly to the windows.*]

BROOKE

Where are you going?

SYLVIA

To the stable.

BROOKE

What for?

SYLVIA

I'm going to take "Gypsy" up the same run and *over* the fence.

BROOKE

Don't be ridiculous.

SYLVIA

I am.

LEONARD

What nonsense, mother. We were only rotting.

BROOKE

Of course we were. Just chaffing.

ACT I: BOYHOOD

LEONARD

Silly old mother. You didn't think we were serious?

SYLVIA

It's the first time I've been thrown since I was a girl.

LEONARD

They play sky-rockets with me. [*To his father.*]
Don't they?

BROOKE

Always. And when I come off I cover much more ground.

SYLVIA

You should have said all that before. I'm going to take him over that fence.

BROOKE

Later. Not now. You're hot—and nervous.

LEONARD

And dusty. Look at that dust! Half a minute. Don't move. I'll soon get rid of that. [*Runs off.*]

[*SYLVIA goes to the window. Her husband stands in front of her.*]

BROOKE

Please don't go.

SYLVIA

You don't think I'm growing too old to ride?

BROOKE

[*Laughs.*] Of course I don't.

SYLVIA

[*Smiles.*] And I'm not *fat*, am I?

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BROOKE

Don't you know when you're being jollied?

SYLVIA

Not about my age—and my weight. They're no joke to a woman. I hate the idea of getting heavy, and—I'm a year older to-day.

LEONARD

[*Rushing in with a clothes brush.*] Here we are. [*Brushes her sleeve and skirt briskly.*] In a couple of shakes no one would know you ever had a speck of dust on you. There we are. Spick and span. How's that?

SYLVIA

[*Smiles at him and pinches his cheek.*] Thank you, dear.

LEONARD

She's melting, father. Say something funny and make her laugh. Laugh for us, mother.

[*SYLVIA grimaces at him, then laughs foolishly.*]

LEONARD

Hurrah! All over?

SYLVIA

Yes.

BROOKE

I apologised. Grovelled. You do the same.

SYLVIA

He says I'm not *fat*—nor *old*.

BROOKE

Go on, my lad. Down on your knees.

ACT I: BOYHOOD

LEONARD

[*Kneeling.*] I apologise—and grovel. *Old?* Why, you look as a girl. And there's many a wench of eighteen might envy you that figure.

BROOKE

[*Severely.*] *Wench?*

LEONARD

Yes. Old English, father.

BROOKE

Not before your mother, my boy. Really. *Wench!*
Oh, no.

LEONARD

I withdraw *wench*, mother.

SYLVIA

[*Laughs; holds out her left hand to her husband and her right to her son.*] You are both forgiven. [*Shivers.*] Age and weight! I've been hiding one and trying to keep *off* the other, for your sakes, for years.

LEONARD

[*Remembers something.*] Oh! What an ass!

[*Rushes off.*]

SYLVIA

I'll never ride that little beast again. Suppose he'd dragged me? I might have been disfigured. [*Shivers.*] Then you and Leonard wouldn't be so proud of me.

BROOKE

Don't be morbid, Sylvia. I beseech you do not be morbid.

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SYLVIA

I'm only vain of my looks because you and Len are.
[*Smiles as she recalls.*] Do you remember him coming home from school when he was quite small and saying solemnly that he was so very glad I "didn't have 'box-pleats' in my face like some of the boys' mothers"?

[*She imitates LEONARD's childish voice as it was at that time and reproduces in pantomime a picture of the mothers referred to.*]

BROOKE

We both spoil you. Ah! And that reminds me. I'm going to spoil you now. I've a birthday present for you. Here.

[*Takes a package from his pocket and hands it to her.*]

SYLVIA

[*Her face lights up as she takes the package.*] The only nice things about birthdays—at my age—are the presents. I was so afraid you'd forgotten.

BROOKE

Many happy returns.

SYLVIA

[*Opening the case and revealing a pearl necklace.*] What a dear! Pearls! [*Holding it up.*] It's perfectly heavenly.

BROOKE

You must wear it to-night. We're all going to the——
[*LEONARD staggers in with a folding step-ladder, making considerable noise. He places it under a*

ACT I: BOYHOOD

pink and grey bowl of flowers suspended from the ceiling.]

BROOKE

What are those for?

LEONARD

[Hurrying out.] Wait a minute. Don't touch them.

SYLVIA

[Looking at the necklace from different angles.]
They're exquisite. I've always wanted one like this.
How did you guess? I love pearls.

BROOKE

Most women do.

SYLVIA

How do you know?

BROOKE

[Severely.] Never mind.

[Placing it around her neck.] Fasten it. *[As he fastens it she croons softly.]*

"The hours I've spent with thee, dear heart,

Are as a string of pearls to me."

[They both laugh.] Do you know this is the twenty-third necklace you've given me?

BROOKE

Is it, really?

SYLVIA

Do you give them because you *like* my neck or to cover it up?

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BROOKE

Because I love it. [*Kisses the back of her neck.*]
I want you to wear it to the theatre tonight. I have
seats for the three of us.

SYLVIA

That will be lovely.

LEONARD

[*Rushes in excitedly with a large parcel which he
places on the lounge and begins to struggle with the
wrapper.*] Take that bowl down, someone.

BROOKE

Why?

LEONARD

Because I've another one here. A real one.

SYLVIA

[*Goes to him; quite interested.*] Have you? What
kind?

LEONARD

[*Still struggling with the parcel.*] Take that down
first. Then I'll show you.

[*SYLVIA goes to the ladder and mounts it.*]

BROOKE

I'll do it.

SYLVIA

Oh, no. I put it up here. A long time ago. [*Takes
bowl off the hook and hands it to BROOKE.*] Do you
remember?

[*BROOKE nods and places bowl on a chair.*]

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LEONARD

[*Producing from the wrapping a much larger and more ornate bowl which he holds high above his head.*]
There! How's that?

SYLVIA

Oh! Purple!

LEONARD

[*Anxiously.*] Do you like it?

SYLVIA

I love it.

LEONARD

[*To his father.*] Do you?

BROOKE

[*Tolerantly.*] Very nice indeed.

LEONARD

[*Disgustedly.*] "Very nice indeed!" Why, it's magnificent. Have you ever seen one like it?

BROOKE

Very likely.

LEONARD

[*Angrily.*] Where?

BROOKE

Oh, here and there.

SYLVIA

Well, I've never seen one quite like it.

LEONARD

[*Handing it up to her.*] I should think not. I had it made for you.

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SYLVIA

[*Hanging it on hook.*] Give me the flowers.

LEONARD

[*Taking flowers from the old bowl; looks scornfully at his father.*] "Very nice indeed"! You've no soul.

BROOKE

Not for bowls, my boy.

LEONARD

[*Handing the flowers up to SYLVIA.*] I love purple. It seems to call out to you.

SYLVIA

[*Arranging the flowers in the new bowl.*] What does it call to you?

LEONARD

It seems to speak of pageants and ceremonials: of wonderful old dead-and-gone days when people *did* things—*big* things. It's the colour of the *great*. It is eloquent, isn't it?

BROOKE

[*Laughingly, as he fills and lights his pipe.*] You are, my lad.

SYLVIA

[*Smiling wistfully.*] Don't you like my quiet colours any more?

LEONARD

[*Quickly.*] Oh, they're all right.

SYLVIA

But they have no majesty? [*Her head on one side, she looks first critically, then admiringly, at the bowl.*]

ACT I: BOYHOOD

You're right. It's quite, quite unusual. [To BROOKE.]
Eh?

BROOKE

Very nice indeed.

[SYLVIA laughs.]

LEONARD

[Gives his father a scornful look, then holds the ladder firmly so that his mother may descend.] But that isn't all.

SYLVIA

Isn't it? [*Half-slips.*]

LEONARD

[Supporting her.] Take care.

SYLVIA

[Reaches the ground safely.] That was close. I nearly fell again.

BROOKE

You'd better keep on the ground for the rest of the day.

SYLVIA

[Loftily.] That wasn't age or weight. I could do that when I was ten. [To LEONARD.] So that isn't all?

LEONARD

Good Lord, no. Not *half*. Barely a *quarter*. Wait a moment. Don't go away. [*Rushes out.*]

SYLVIA

[Picks up the old bowl, smiles at it. Looks up at the new one then at her husband. She makes a rueful face

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at the startling new purple bowl.] It does seem to talk, doesn't it, Marshall?

BROOKE

Out of key.

SYLVIA

It *shocks*. Nice old bowl.

[Takes the old one on to the porch.]

LEONARD

[Totters in with a large purple folding-screen.]
Where are you, mother?

SYLVIA

[Re-appearing from porch.] Here I am.

[Looks in amazement at the screen which LEONARD has now opened out in all its sections and is surveying enthusiastically.]

BROOKE

Great heavens!

SYLVIA

Purple!

LEONARD

[Triumphantly.] Well? How do you like it?

SYLVIA

It's wonderful.

[SYLVIA and LEONARD turn instinctively to see the effect on BROOKE.]

BROOKE

[Nods condescendingly.] Very nice. Very nice indeed.

ACT I: BOYHOOD

LEONARD

[*Scornfully.*] Nice! Those are nice. [*Pointing to articles on the table, then looking at the purple screen rapturously.*] But—ah!

SYLVIA

Where shall we put it?

BROOKE

In the garage.

LEONARD

Where? Why in place of *that*.

[*Points to the old pink and grey screen.*]

SYLVIA

Oh, no, Leonard. It's been here for years.

LEONARD

Too many. Wait until you see *this* in its place. [*Looks around the room with the critical eye of an interior decorator.*] We'll make it a jolly room when we follow out the new colour scheme.

BROOKE

Jolly? Awful.

LEONARD

[*Scornfully.*] Napoleon wept over purple.

BROOKE

[*Looking at the new bowl and screen.*] And well he might.

LEONARD

Some people are colour-blind. It's pathetic what they miss in life.

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BROOKE

Don't you patronise me or I'll throw it [*pointing to bowl*] on the ash-heap and make that horrible screen into firewood.

LEONARD

It's dreadful to have a vandal in the family. How have you lived with him all these years in all this ugliness? How that jars now! [*Indicating old screen.*] Out with it!

[*Closes up the old screen and goes out with it.*]

SYLVIA

[*Arranges the purple screen.*] Doesn't it make you feel old having the room changed?

BROOKE

You shouldn't encourage him. Dreadful things.

SYLVIA

It's his individuality asserting itself.

BROOKE

Why should it break out in purple?

SYLVIA

Oh, Marshall.

BROOKE

I believe if he re-did the room in canary-yellow you'd breathe a deep sigh and murmur "Oh! Yellow!" Such nonsense.

LEONARD

[*Hurrying in; looking at the effect.*] Ah! that's better. We'll have a purple carpet and purple hang-

ACT I: BOYHOOD

ings—— [*Alters the screen to his liking.*] That's more like it. To think a majestic colour like that could bring tears to the eyes of an emperor. [*Looks at his father.*] I wish I could teach you to—— [BROOKE *frowns at his son, takes his pipe and tobacco pouch, goes out on to the porch; sits and smokes.* LEONARD *watching his father go out; turns to SYLVIA.*] It's pathetic. You have to be *born* with a sense of beauty. You can't learn it.

SYLVIA

Where did *you* learn the majesty of purple?

LEONARD

[*Evasively.*] Oh, I've always liked it.

SYLVIA

You never seemed discontented with *my* colours before.

LEONARD

[*Hurriedly.*] I'm not. Really. This is the first time I've been able to give you a real present. With *my own* money. I'm awfully grateful to Uncle Will for leaving me such a nice little nest-egg. I forgive him everything—even for painting that dreadful picture of me. [*Looking up at a portrait in oils of himself at a very youthful age, hanging high on the wall.*] Was I ever like that?

SYLVIA

It's exactly as you were at five.

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LEONARD

[*Looking at it disgustedly.*] Was I, really? Why didn't you have my hair cut?

SYLVIA

I did. [*Laughs.*] When the barber cut off one long curl I picked it up in a panic and tried to put it back again. Really I did.

LEONARD

[*Laughing with her.*] How silly.

SYLVIA

I loved your curls.

LEONARD

[*Looks at the picture again.*] I looked like a girl. Well, I'm glad I didn't stay yellow. Let's put it in another room. [*Starting up.*]

SYLVIA

No. You may change my bowl and screen and purple up the whole room but *that* stays where it is.

LEONARD

Oh, all right. But it does make you rather sick when you're grown up.

[*Turns away from it with a shiver.*]

SYLVIA

Olive loves it.

LEONARD

[*Uncomfortably.*] Oh?

SYLVIA

And Olive loves you. And I'm sure you love Olive. Don't you?

ACT I: BOYHOOD

LEONARD

[*Irritably.*] Now, mother——

BROOKE

[*On the porch calling to some people in the distance.*]
Hello. How are you? [*Coming into the room; angrily.*] Mrs. Hood. She's got into the garden again.

SYLVIA

Bring her in, dear. Is Olive with her?

BROOKE

Yes. What are we going to do?

SYLVIA

Make them welcome, of course. Go on.

BROOKE

[*Disappears into the garden and is heard calling.*]
Come in this way. I'll open the gate.

LEONARD

What in the world have they come for?

SYLVIA

What has *Olive* come for? Why have you changed your tie four times a day lately?

LEONARD

[*Seriously and rapidly.*] I have a great deal to tell you, mother. I wanted to get you alone this afternoon. It's a shame these people coming in like this.

SYLVIA

They may not stay long.

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LEONARD

But I'm going up to town by the four-something—twenty or thirty.

SYLVIA

[*Very disappointed.*] Oh, no, Leonard. Not on my birthday. You mustn't.

LEONARD

That's the worst of it. I promised—oh, a long time ago—to dine in town to-night.

SYLVIA

Can't you get out of it?

LEONARD

[*Quickly.*] No. I can't, really. I'd like to, of course. But I've promised.

[*The voices of BROOKE and the newcomers sound quite near. A woman's voice says distinctly: "Don't shut my dress in the gate." A girl's voice replies: "No, mother." BROOKE is heard welcoming them with much heartiness.*

BROOKE

Here we are. And very nice, too.

LEONARD

[*Picks up the wrappings of the parcel and the step-ladder and hurries out.*] Awful, breaking in on us like this.

[*BROOKE appears on the porch and ushers into the room MRS. HOOD, a severely respectable, some-*

ACT I: BOYHOOD

what portly, middle-aged woman. She is breathing heavily from a combination of exercise and closely-fitting corsets. Her eyes rest longingly on a chair. She is closely followed by her daughter, OLIVE: a slight, spirituelle, graceful girl of eighteen.]

SYLVIA

[*Pleasantly.*] How are you, Elizabeth?

MRS. HOOD

Hot.

[*She looks at the various chairs, decides she would prefer the lounge and goes straight to it and sits.*]

SYLVIA

[*Embracing OLIVE.*] Well, Olive! What a sweet hat!

OLIVE

Do you like it?

SYLVIA

I do. It's charming of you to have thought of us, dear Elizabeth. Isn't it, Marshall?

BROOKE

Most. Very nice of them. It'll quite brighten up the afternoon.

MRS. HOOD

[*Sitting bolt upright through corset-pressure, fanning herself.*] I didn't want to come. A hot day like this. I would much rather have stayed at home.

BROOKE

Why didn't you? Hot day like this.

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MRS. HOOD

Olive wanted to.

BROOKE

Oh? *Olive* wanted to. [*Shakes his head at OLIVE.*]
Ah!

MRS. HOOD

Your birthday, or something.

BROOKE

Then it was *your* fault, Sylvia, dragging this poor woman out on a hot day like this.

SYLVIA

Marshall, do be quiet. Sit down.

[*BROOKE is about to sit beside Mrs. Hood and continue "ragging" her.*]

No. Over there.

[*BROOKE sits over near the wall scowling at the visitors.*]

MRS. HOOD

Is it your birthday? Or has she made a mistake?
It would be just like her.

SYLVIA

She hasn't. It *is* my birthday and it was very sweet of you to come.

OLIVE

[*Takes a miniature out of tissue paper and shyly gives it to SYLVIA.*]

Many happy returns.

ACT I: BOYHOOD

SYLVIA

[*Brightens with real pleasure as she looks at it.*]
Oh! How darling. Did you paint it yourself?

OLIVE

Yes. It's not very good.

SYLVIA

Indeed it is. [*Showing it to her husband.*] Isn't it, Marshall?

BROOKE

[*Looking at it cursorily.*] Very nice. Who is it?

OLIVE

Why it's——

BROOKE

Don't tell me. [*Examines it closely; looks up at SYLVIA.*] You! Eh?

SYLVIA

Of course it is.

BROOKE

[*Looking at it more closely.*]

I knew it was. There's a distinct resemblance—here and there. Very nice. Very nice indeed.

SYLVIA

[*Snatches it; grimaces at him.*]

Nice! [*To OLIVE.*] It's perfect. [*To MRS. HOOD.*]
Have you seen it?

MRS. HOOD

[*Snorts.*]

Seen it? Every day for three months. Waste of time.

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SYLVIA

Oh, no, it isn't. You have a great gift, Olive. Hasn't she, Marshall?

BROOKE

[*Returning eagerly to tease Mrs. Hood.*]

She has. You must admit that, Elizabeth. Olive *has a great gift*. I *knew* it was Sylvia in a moment.

MRS. HOOD

A lot of good *that* kind of gift is in a home.

BROOKE

Oh, I don't know. Leonard's beginning to turn out a few things. Really nice things. Quite nice. He painted a hay-stack last week. [*Winks at SYLVIA*] and our old horse——

SYLVIA

[*Trying to stop him.*]

Marshall!

MRS. HOOD

You shouldn't encourage him.

BROOKE

I don't. But the *horse* was very complimentary. He tried to eat it.

[*SYLVIA motions BROOKE to go back to his seat by the wall.*]

SYLVIA

Don't pay any attention to him, Elizabeth. He's in a vile mood to-day.

MRS. HOOD

It's no work for a man. *Or* for a woman. Give me

ACT I: BOYHOOD

pictures already painted that you can hang on the wall—
not messed about all over the place.

BROOKE

Quite right. On the wall of an empty room.

SYLVIA

How did you do it without a sitting, Olive?

OLIVE

From a photograph Leonard gave me.

SYLVIA

[*Kisses her.*]

It's most kind of you, dear, and I love it.

[*LEONARD comes in very serious and dignified to meet
the guests. He has changed into a lounge-suit.*

BROOKE catches his eye and points to MRS. HOOD.

LEONARD goes reluctantly to greet her.]

MRS. HOOD

[*Severely.*]

Oh! *There* you are.

LEONARD

[*Shaking hands with her very stiffly.*]

How are you? [*Turns and sees OLIVE.*] Hello,
Olive.

OLIVE

[*Faintly.*] Hello, Len.

[*They shake hands: SYLVIA holds their hands to-
gether for a moment smiling happily at them.*

*LEONARD becomes painfully embarrassed: OLIVE
shyly happy.*]

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SYLVIA

[*Showing* LEONARD *the miniature.*]

From Olive. Isn't it a dear?

LEONARD

[*Examining the miniature critically.*]

I say, it's splendid, isn't it? You *are* improving. The colouring's fine. And you've got mother's nose to the point. It's jolly.

OLIVE

[*Brightens and looks affectionately at him.*]

Do you really like it?

LEONARD

[*In the manner of a master.*]

Yes, I do. Oh, yes. You're not very strong on *necks*, are you?

OLIVE

[*Disappointed.*] Oh, Leonard! I liked that best of all.

LEONARD

You can do better than that. See—[*pointing to his mother*] it's mother's big asset. Father's always laying offerings at its base.

SYLVIA

And Leonard used to give me bracelets because he thought my hands pretty. Now I've reached the age of the "community"-present. Screens, bowls, articles for the house.

LEONARD

I thought it was time someone got a background for your pretty hair.

ACT I: BOYHOOD

SYLVIA

Sweet boy!

MRS. HOOD

[*Disgusted.*] You *do* swallow more obvious compliments——

SYLVIA

Don't I? My appetite is enormous for them.

LEONARD

Nice old lady.

MRS. HOOD

Who?

LEONARD

Mother, of course. [*To OLIVE.*] Come to the light. I'll show you what I mean. [*He takes OLIVE on to the porch where they can be seen distinctly as LEONARD expounds the art of painting to her.*]

BROOKE

[*To Mrs. Hood.*] Has she done you?

MRS. HOOD

No. And she's not going to. [*Struggling miserably with cushions in a vain effort to relax.*]

SYLVIA

You don't look comfortable.

MRS. HOOD

I'm not. I hate your furniture.

SYLVIA

[*As she squeezes cushions all around Mrs. Hood,*

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laughs.] It's not *my* furniture. It's your *corset*.
Why people wear cages I can't understand.

MRS. HOOD

Now don't begin on that again. *You* don't understand
why people wear *clothes*.

SYLVIA

No. I don't. And if *someone* hadn't started the
fashion *I* wouldn't.

BROOKE

Sylvia! Really!

SYLVIA

Well, not so many.

BROOKE

Not before Elizabeth, my dear.

MRS. HOOD

[*Beckons to BROOKE and points to OLIVE and LEONARD
chatting on the porch.*]

They look well together, don't they?

BROOKE

Who?

MRS. HOOD

The children. Olive and Leonard.

BROOKE

[*Glancing at them.*] Oh, yes. Very nice.

MRS. HOOD

[*Sighs.*] Dear me! It takes me back to my own time.
I was just like her once.

ACT I: BOYHOOD

BROOKE

No. Really?

MRS. HOOD

A rail.

BROOKE

A *what?*

MRS. HOOD

Really! A rail.

BROOKE

Fancy that.

MRS. HOOD

Now look at me. [*Wriggles uncomfortably. Looks enviously at SYLVIA.*] How do you keep slim?

SYLVIA

[*Laughs.*] Directly I think I'm growing *fat* I take it off.

MRS. HOOD

Mine won't come off.

BROOKE

A friend of mine tried living on *butter* for three months and lost thirty pounds.

SYLVIA

Marshall!

BROOKE

Well thirty pounds! That's a great deal, Elizabeth.

MRS. HOOD

[*Ignoring him.*] What do you do, Sylvia? *Diet?*

SYLVIA

Exercise. I walk, play tennis, swim, ride——

BROOKE

Oh, yes. Sylvia *rides*. She gets a good deal of exer-

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cise that way. More than most people. Especially when she *tumbles*.

SYLVIA

[*Checks him, reproachfully.*]

Marshall! [*To Mrs. Hood.*] I don't give myself a chance to get heavy.

MRS. HOOD

You'll hurt yourself doing those things.

BROOKE

[*Quickly.*] She *did* just now. Out there. Fell off. Fell right off. [*To SYLVIA.*] Didn't you?

SYLVIA

What a tease you are.

MRS. HOOD

We can't do that kind of thing at our age.

BROOKE

Our age?

MRS. HOOD

No. *Her* age. [*SYLVIA laughs.*] Well, there's not much difference. [*SYLVIA laughs heartily.*] How old is Leonard?

SYLVIA

Nineteen. I'm thirty-six.

MRS. HOOD

Thirty-six! [*Thinks as she calculates.*]

SYLVIA

Yes. That's right, isn't it? But I don't feel a minute

ACT I: BOYHOOD

older than Len. I look at life, most of the time, through his eyes. That's how I keep young.

[BROOKE *not liking the trend of the conversation, creeps quietly to the door.*]

MRS. HOOD

You've got a shock coming to you some day. [SYLVIA *laughs immoderately.*] Do you approve——? [Turns to BROOKE, misses him, then discovers him by the door.] Do you approve of it?

BROOKE

[*Vaguely, anxious to get away.*] Eh? Yes. No. They're a pair of children.

MRS. HOOD

[*Snorts.*] Children!

BROOKE

Really they are. Nice children, but—children. [*Turns to door.*]

SYLVIA

Are you going away, Marshall?

BROOKE

No. [*As the two women turn to each other he goes out softly.*]

MRS. HOOD

That's only playing at motherhood. Where's your dignity?

SYLVIA

Why dignity? That only frightens children. Drives them away from you. I wanted Leonard to grow up

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looking on me as his companion as well as his mother—. And he does. That is the relationship we have to each other.

MRS. HOOD

I haven't brought Olive up that way. [*Chuckles grimly.*] Oh, no! I have always had too much dignity for *that*. It's born in me. People naturally look up to me. Olive does. She's got to. I know every thought in her mind. She idolizes me.

SYLVIA

[*Mischievously.*] How can she help it?

MRS. HOOD

Exactly. I brought her into the world at a great deal of personal inconvenience. [*Closes her eyes at this remembrance.*] *What* an inconvenience. I have fed her, clothed her and educated her at a great deal of expense. Why? Just to turn her over to some young man when the time comes. That's all motherhood is. Worry and trouble and expense from the time they're born until they're married off. *Then*, if they make a mistake, *more* worry. All I ask from Olive—and I insist on—is obedience, gratitude, and, of course, *love*. I *insist* on them, and I get them, because I'm her mother.

SYLVIA

Leonard loves me quite irrespective and outside of the fact that I'm his mother. He *admires* me. I never *demand* anything in the name of *mother*. I always *ask* in the name of *love*. And where there is love there must be obedience to the loved-one's wishes. As to *gratitude*

ACT I: BOYHOOD

it is all mine. Since my real happiness has been in him. Don't you feel it to Olive?

MRS. HOOD

Gratitude to *Olive*? What have *I* to be grateful for? I nearly lost my life having her. And half the time I'm sick with anxiety wondering if she'll ever repay all I've done for her.

SYLVIA

Surely she *has* repaid you? No matter what a child does or becomes its debt is always paid. They pay you when their little arms first cling around your neck; when you live again through their triumphs at school; their first love; their first child. It's a joy, is motherhood—a blessed chance to revive one's own youth. It's a joy.

MRS. HOOD

You've got a nasty surprise coming to you.

SYLVIA

I think not.

MRS. HOOD

Has Leonard said anything to Olive?

SYLVIA

No. But I think he means to. Just before you came in he said he wanted to have a long talk with me.

MRS. HOOD

Hurry him up. Olive's moping about, too. If they're too shy to speak out let us do it for them.

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SYLVIA

[*Taking a photograph-album off the table and opening it.*] All right, Elizabeth. I will. Have you seen these?

MRS. HOOD

No. What are they?

SYLVIA

Photographs of Leonard ever since he was a little baby. [*Casually turns over the leaves, Mrs. Hood glancing at them.*]

MRS. HOOD

That's a pretty one. I don't believe in long engagements.

SYLVIA

That was taken when he was seven.

MRS. HOOD

[*Glancing at it.*] Marry them young and keep them out of mischief.

SYLVIA

Not at *seven*?

MRS. HOOD

Don't be silly.

SYLVIA

[*Smiling.*] His father and I married young.

MRS. HOOD

There you are. And it turned out all right—so far as one can see.

SYLVIA

Yes, it did. Even where you *can't* see.

ACT I: BOYHOOD

MRS. HOOD

[*Grunts.*] I've looked out a little place they can take at first. It's between our two houses—rather nearer mine. We'd better keep them under our eye for a bit.

SYLVIA

[*Laughs.*] You're a funny old dear. [*Puts her arm around her.*]

MRS. HOOD

[*Releasing herself.*] *Funny? Well!*

SYLVIA

When two people are in love they should be as free as the air.

MRS. HOOD

Whom will they turn to?

SYLVIA

Each other. We did. [*Points to a photograph in the album.*] That's the one I like best. Isn't it good?

MRS. HOOD

[*Peevishly.*] Yes, it is; very. *I'm* not going to let go of Olive, whoever she marries. What do they know about life?

SYLVIA

Leonard knows something. I told him.

MRS. HOOD

Did you?

SYLVIA

Yes. I've never believed in lying to children. It's not fair to them or to yourself. [*Turns back leaves of album*

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to find a particular photograph.] At that age he began to doubt Santa Claus. He couldn't understand how he could come down the chimney with all the presents. So I told him the truth, before "the boy next door" could. He fretted for a few days. But I reasoned him out of it by asking him if he wouldn't rather know that his father and mother gave him all the pretty things instead of a long-whiskered old gentleman he didn't even know. That cheered him up, and by the following Christmas he was quite reconciled to Santa Claus being a pleasant, childish fiction. [*Turns leaves, and points to another photograph.*] One day, when he was *that* age, he said: "Don't tell me the storks bring the babies, because they're all shut up in the Zoological Gardens. I know. And if the doctor brings 'em where does he get them?" I saw how his little brain was puzzled and, instead of evading the point, as most parents do, I decided to forestall "the boy next door" from telling him in some hideous way, and giving his mind the wrong outlook.

MRS. HOOD

[*Horrifed.*] What did you tell him?

SYLVIA

The truth.

MRS. HOOD

[*Aghast.*] You *didn't*!

SYLVIA

Why not? Is there any more beautiful truth to tell that than of motherhood? In my opinion it's better for a child to learn the truth from his mother than to pick

ACT I: BOYHOOD

it up in some vulgar, common way. Why not impress it on his mind in some beautiful form while he still retains all the imagination and the wonder God has put there? So I told him. I told him the great mystery of life as I feel it should be told to children—not as something to speak of in secret among themselves, but as the most marvellously beautiful thing in all Nature. I explained that the tiny baby, before it was born, took its life from the body of its mother; that it came into life through the mother's pain and tears, and that because of the sacred and wonderful privilege God had given to women all men who were *really* men were always gentle and considerate and tender toward them. I taught him why a man always protected his woman-kind—because they were the mothers of the race. They carried in them the little lives that afterwards peopled the world. Again I saw the small brain trying to grapple with its new wonders. In a few days the keynote of his future manhood stood revealed. A new look came into his eyes—a tender one of pity, protection, and love. He would watch me anxiously. Bring me a shawl if the air was cold, a footstool if I looked at all tired, and run for my slippers. I had taken on a new value in his eyes—a value that has steadily and surely increased. I was not only his mother. I was a *woman*, the wonder-woman, who brings forth children. Even at that age he had learnt what chivalry meant. [*Closes album.*] I sometimes wonder when I see women standing, weary with their day's work, in public conveyances, whether, if the men sitting stolidly and selfishly

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in their seats had been told in their childhood of the delicate mechanism that constitutes womanhood, they would shame their manhood by remaining seated. The age of chivalry will never die so long as from the time a boy can first understand life he is taught what motherhood is, and what is really meant by the word "*woman*".

MRS. HOOD

[*Grunts and shakes her head disapprovingly.*] It all sounds very improper. Very. I think it shameless talking to children about such things. Nothing *marvellous* about motherhood to me. The less said about it the better.

SYLVIA

The *more* said about it the better. If mothers don't glorify motherhood who will? We should all be careful of the "boy next door".

MRS. HOOD

What do you mean, "the boy next door?" There's no house near here?

SYLVIA

Well, let us say the boy chum at school—the one who has learnt something which he whispers in a furtive way as if it were a thing to be ashamed of. *That* kind of distorted knowledge causes a child to look curiously, and in the wrong way, at his parents. Then it *is* a thing to be ashamed of. I saved Leonard from that. He only saw the beauty and mystery of it.

[*OLIVE and LEONARD come in from the porch and stand at the window talking.*]

ACT I: BOYHOOD

MRS. HOOD

I'd be ashamed to tell Olive such things. *Her mind is like a piece of white paper. Why, if she as much as thought—*

[*SYLVIA sees the young people, calls Mrs. Hood's attention to them, and checks her.*]

LEONARD

[*Brings OLIVE down to screen, and points out bowl.*]
There! They are not so bad?

OLIVE

[*Looks at them and then at LEONARD.*] They're beautiful—just what I would expect of you.

LEONARD

[*Pleased.*] Really?

MRS. HOOD

[*Looking in disgust at bowl and screen.*] Why, where's your pretty screen with the pink roses?

SYLVIA

Gone for ever. These are Leonard's birthday presents.

MRS. HOOD

[*Decidedly.*] I don't like them. Not at all. They look *fast* to me.

LEONARD

[*Disgustedly.*] Fast?

SYLVIA

Nonsense. Leonard wanted purple in the room, so we have purple. They're quite beautiful, Leonard.

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BROOKE

[*On the porch.*] [*Calls loudly and gleefully to someone in the distance.*]

Hello, you old rascal! Come up here!

[*There is an answering call, and Brooke shouts excitedly to SYLVIA in the manner of a man rescued from drowning.*]

It's Saxon! Godfrey Saxon! What a bit of luck!

[*Looks at Mrs. Hood, then goes off porch to meet SAXON.*]

LEONARD

Saxon! Hurrah! [*Hurries out on to porch.*]

MRS. HOOD

[*Frowningly and ominously.*]

Godfrey Saxon! Well, one of us is not going to stay long. I can't bear him—the familiar creature. [*To OLIVE.*] Don't you listen to him. Sit over there. [*Points to chair.*]

[*OLIVE meekly goes to it and sits.*]

[*GODFREY SAXON, a grizzled, sunburned, active little man, well over fifty, comes breezily on to the porch. He has all the characteristics of the horseman and all-around open-air lover. He is in well-worn dusty riding togs.*]

SAXON

Hello, old sport!

BROOKE

[*Exuberantly.*] Manna in the wilderness!

SAXON

Who is?

ACT I: BOYHOOD

BROOKE

[*Laughing excitedly.*] You are. On the spot at the right moment.

SAXON

I am?

BROOKE

[*Clapping him on the back.*] Go in and you'll know what I mean.

SAXON

Have you been drinking?

BROOKE

No. But I'm going to. Go on in.

SAXON

Never knew I was so popular.

BROOKE

I'll wear you next my heart after this.

SAXON

[*Greets SYLVIA.*] What's the matter with yer husband? A touch o' the sun? [*Takes her hand.*] Radiant, as always. Havin' a jolly birthday?

SYLVIA

How did you know?

SAXON

A little bird whispered it. A chaffinch, my dear. [*Takes out a bouquet from inside his coat.*] So I cut these off me prize bushes. [*Sniffs the bouquet, then hands it with a flourish to SYLVIA.*] To the fragrant! Bless ye!

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SYLVIA

[*Smiles.*] Oh! It's very kind of you. [*Buries her face in the flowers.*]

SAXON

Not a bit. I wanted to see ye smile—show y'r teeth, an' look happy.

SYLVIA

I am, I do. [*Laughs and shows her teeth.*]

SAXON

[*Laughs.*] There y'are! Now I'm in y'r debt. [*Sees OLIVE, and goes over to her.*] Ho, ho! My other darling!

[*MRS. HOOD snorts indignantly as he hurries over to OLIVE and takes her hand in both of his.*]

An' how's the precious little chicken?

[*OLIVE glances up at him with a faint smile and then lowers her eyes. He turns to SYLVIA and BROOKE.*]

The wonderful age! Bones and blushes!

MRS. HOOD

[*Angrily.*] Oh!

SAXON

[*Turns and sees her.*] Ah, ha! I see ye! I knew ye wouldn't be far away. [*Hurries to her and takes up her unwilling hand.*] An' how's the careful hen?

MRS. HOOD

[*Snatching her hand away, indignantly.*] What?

SAXON

[*Turning to BROOKE, who is very pleased at MRS. HOOD's annoyance.*] See that? [*Re-produces MRS.*

ACT I: BOYHOOD

HOOD's *abrupt withdrawal of her hand: turns to* MRS. HOOD.] Why, sweet lady? Don't ye like "hen"? She's a noble bird. Unselfish, indulgent to her brood, provides us with nourishment—and *chickens* [*glances at* OLIVE] and lays down her life for us. A useful and picturesque career. I suppose if I'd said *duck* ye'd have beamed on me! [*To* BROOKE.] Odd, ain't it? [MRS. HOOD *snorts indignantly.*] I withdraw "hen." [*Looks at* MRS. HOOD *appraisingly.*] The "duck" looks full of health and temper. I love it in a mare *and* a mother. [MRS. HOOD *turns her back to him: he winks gaily at the others and prepares to harangue* MRS. HOOD *again.*]

SYLVIA

[*Coming to the rescue, crosses to* Saxon, *shakes her head reprovngly at him, and shows him the necklace.*]

Godfrey! Isn't that adorable?

SAXON

What young man gave you that?

SYLVIA

[*Nodding towards* BROOKE.] My lover.

SAXON

He ought to have known better. Pearls! They revive painful memories. [*Shivers.*] I've given bucketsful. [*Waves them away.*] Cover 'em up!

SYLVIA

I used to dread birthdays. I hated the idea that records were kept of our ages. A pain at twenty means

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nothing—at forty we fear appendicitis. *That's* what birthdays do.

SAXON

[*To BROOKE.*] She's found it. [*To MRS. HOOD.*] We old 'ns have given up the search, haven't we, dear lady?

MRS. HOOD

[*Angrily.*] What search?

SAXON

For eternal youth—like hers.

MRS. HOOD

Rubbish! Eternal nothing!

SAXON

I wish *I'd* found the secret. I'm sure you do, too. Come, own up. *I* do. When *hair* leaves a man—[*passing his fingers through his scanty hairs*] and fat creeps on to a woman—[*looking at* MRS. HOOD) it's no use pretending. We *know* youth's gone. Romance can survive many things—poverty, disillusionment—but *fat*, never. There's no poetry in fat.

MRS. HOOD

If I had a wooden leg, or a glass eye, no one would think of referring to it. But people have no thought for the sensitiveness of a fat person. It's disgusting.

SAXON

[*Looks at SYLVIA, who shakes her head disapprovingly.*]

ACT I: BOYHOOD

[To MRS. HOOD, *indicating* SYLVIA.] But she's marvelous. Isn't she?

MRS. HOOD

Yes, she is—for a woman of *her* time of life, with a grown son.

SYLVIA

Because we gain a child we needn't lose a figure. I think some people age more quickly than others because they become *parents* instead of playmates. We're playmates. I still play all his games.

BROOKE

[*Laughing.*] That's a fact. She can beat him at most of them. [To LEONARD.] Can't she?

LEONARD

Yes. Especially *riding*.

MRS. HOOD

It doesn't seem decent to me for a woman to be playing silly games with men—at *our* age.

BROOKE

Now exactly how old are you really, dear Elizabeth?

MRS. HOOD

Oh, I don't mind telling anyone. I never *lie* about it. I'm *forty*.

[BROOKE *suggests astonishment.*]

SYLVIA

That's quite right, Marshall. We went to school together. Elizabeth is only forty.

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BROOKE

You quite misunderstood me—I didn't think she was even that. Eh—Godfrey?

SAXON

Nowhere near. Wonderfully preserved. [*He winks at BROOKE.*]

MRS. HOOD

Olive was born when I was twenty-two. No woman should have children before that. It's not decent.

BROOKE

What was that you were telling me, Godfrey,—that in Spain a girl of fourteen——?

SAXON

Yes, at *fourteen*. I saw one, a darling. And the baby——

SYLVIA

Never mind—now stop it—both of you.

MRS. HOOD

I suppose, as you are only thirty-six, you tell everyone that Leonard was born when you were seventeen?

SYLVIA

[*Laughing.*] No. I always say *twelve*. It makes me appear so much younger. They don't believe me. But they wouldn't if I told them the truth. [*Whimsically.*] If it wasn't for that big boy my young hats and frivolous dresses would convince anybody.

ACT I: BOYHOOD

MRS. HOOD

Such affectation is ridiculous.

SYLVIA

It isn't affectation. I'm going to remain young as long as I can, and pretty while I may, so that Leonard and his father will be proud of me. No one dreams we're mother and son when we dance together at parties. [*To LEONARD.*] Do they?

LEONARD

No.

SYLVIA

Until they've been told. And, of course, someone always does tell.

LEONARD

I wanted to call her "Sylvia," but she wouldn't have it, would you?

SYLVIA

[*Smiling at LEONARD.*] No. I think "Mother" is the loveliest name in the world. But a child that size is an awful weapon for the jealous to hurl at one's birth certificate.

MRS. HOOD

I suppose you'll wait till you're a grandmother before you give up?

SYLVIA

[*Laughs.*] Then I'll play with my grandchildren.

MRS. HOOD

You've got *such* a shock coming to you.

THE HARP OF LIFE

SAXON

[*Chuckling at Mrs. HOOD's discomfiture.*] She's right, kind lady. [To SYLVIA.] Ye have the key to the only thing that makes life bearable.

SYLVIA

Yes. I think I have. And it's not youth—it's *love*. Youth has its thousand sorrows and disappointments. Love keeps life bright and full, as my two men have kept mine. Leonard, did you see that poem I marked for you this morning? The lines were written by a mother to her son. It's quite wonderful. I wonder if I can remember the last verse. It is almost a prayer.

[*Puts both hands on LEONARD's shoulders, looks straight into his eyes, and quotes:*]

"For my love make no woman weep,
For my love hold no woman cheap.
And see you give no woman scorn
For that dark night when you were born.

Beloved, all my years belong

To you. Go thread them for a song."

[*She takes her hands from LEONARD's shoulders.*

OLIVE looks up at him. He turns away uncomfortably and stands thinking. There is a general movement.]

I'm sorry! I didn't mean to recite.

BROOKE

Not at all, dear. You did it very nicely. Now perhaps, Elizabeth, you will oblige—a song, or a dance,—or a little poetry?

ACT I: BOYHOOD

MRS. HOOD

There's only one way to bring up children. Keep them under your eyes. Then, if anything goes wrong, *you're* not to blame.

SYLVIA

If anything goes wrong, what does it matter *who* is to blame?

[BROOKE suggests in pantomime to SAXON that they get out. SAXON agrees with alacrity. Just as they get to window—]

Marshall, where are you going?

BROOKE

[*Coming in again.*] I'm going to show Godfrey the new acres.

SYLVIA

Wait. [*They stop.*] We'll take Mrs. Hood. [*To Mrs. Hood.*] Come on, Elizabeth.

BROOKE

[*Under his breath.*] Damn! [*Takes SAXON on to porch.*]

MRS. HOOD

[*Goes with SYLVIA towards window. Calls to OLIVE.*] Come along. [*Looks at her severely.*] Pull your dress down! [*Clicks her tongue.*] Ts! Ts! Ts! [*Smiles sourly at LEONARD.*] Bring her, Leonard. [*Shakes her finger at him.*] You naughty boy! I hope you tell *your* mother everything. Every single thing. [*Goes out on to porch with SYLVIA, they follow the men, and disappear.*]

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OLIVE

[*Follows her mother to window, stops, looks back and sees LEONARD quite still, frowning, and lost in thought. She hesitates, then goes slowly down to him, whispers shyly:*]

Leonard. *I love purple.*

[*LEONARD looks quickly at her. She nods towards screen and bowl.*]

I think they're beautiful. It was horrid of mother to say what she did. She doesn't understand art—nor you.

Nor me. I don't agree with her at all. *Your mother is an angel.*

LEONARD

[*Quite uncomfortable.*] Yes. She's been splendid to me.

OLIVE

It must be wonderful to have a mother you're proud of—whom everyone adores. It's dreadful when you've not, and nobody does, don't you think?

LEONARD

It must be.

OLIVE

It is. Of course, I *love* her, and everything, but—I do want to get married.

LEONARD

[*Aghast.*] Married?

OLIVE

[*Nods, her eyes dancing happily.*] Yes, don't you?

LEONARD

Well—of course—I—— [*Stops dead, unable to say another word.*]

ACT I: BOYHOOD

OLIVE

[*With a little sigh of prospective contentment.*] It will be lovely to be able to do everything you like, with nobody to say "you mustn't."

LEONARD

Is that your idea of marriage?

OLIVE

[*Smiles, and nods vigorously.*] Yes. Just like Sylvia. To be always pretty, and dress beautifully, and have lovely things about you. [*Looks at screen and bowl.*] I'll have purple, too. All over the house. It will be wonderful. To play games, and laugh through life—happy. It will be glorious. I hate life when it's all "mustn'ts".

LEONARD

[*Trying to make a ghastly joke.*] Suppose your husband "mustn'ts".

OLIVE

Oh, but you won't.

LEONARD

[*Horror-stricken.*] I?

OLIVE

[*Nods.*] Yes. I'm sure you'll be just like Sylvia. I suppose you should have spoken first. You don't mind, do you? You see, it's all arranged.

LEONARD

[*Cold and rigid.*] By whom?

OLIVE

Our mothers. Mine has even picked out our home. Quite near hers, so that she can watch us. You won't

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allow that, will you? Oh, I must get away from my home, away from my mother. I want to be able to stretch my arms, take a deep breath, and feel free. You will do that, won't you? [*Smiles happily at him.*]

LEONARD

[*Bewildered.*] I think there's been some mistake.

OLIVE

[*Stands quite still, her smile fades, a catch comes into her voice.*] Mistake?

[*In a whisper, fearfully.*] Mistake!

LEONARD

There must be.

OLIVE

[*Trembling, all illusion gone.*] Aren't you going to marry me?

LEONARD

[*In distress.*] I can't.

OLIVE

[*Faintly.*] Why? Don't you like me?

LEONARD

Oh, yes. I have—always. But—marriage! It *must* be a mistake.

OLIVE

[*Half-pleading, almost in despair.*] If you like me it needn't be.

[*Pause. Steps to him. Shyly.*] I love you.

[*She looks long at his face. It is set and hard.*]
I thought when you kissed me, and said how proud you

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were of me, and how you wanted me always with you—
[*Her appeal has no effect on him.*] I see. It must be
a mistake.

LEONARD

But—we were only children then.

OLIVE

[*Reproachfully.*] Three months ago!

LEONARD

Is that all it is?

OLIVE

Yes. In my work-room, when I first showed you my
pictures. . . . Has your love all gone?

LEONARD

It will never do that. I have too many happy memories
of you. But it's—it's—[*Beats his hands in distress.*]

OLIVE

You don't love me enough to marry me? [*He turns
towards her, but does not answer.*] I see you don't.
It is a mistake. I'm so sorry. [*Quite bravely.*] Don't
be unhappy about it. It's all my fault. I shouldn't
have said anything. Only I thought it was all under-
stood. . . . I'm so very, very sorry.

LEONARD

[*Quite miserable.*] It's an awful shame. [*His back
is turned to her.*]

OLIVE

[*Quickly.*] Oh, no, it isn't. It doesn't matter, really.
[*Growing braver, she talks rapidly to cover her emo-*

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tion.] Don't feel badly about it. I wouldn't like you to do that. *I don't.* [*Tries to laugh.*] Mother always muddles things. [*Suddenly and anxiously.*] Don't let her know, Len, will you? She'd be so horrid to me.

LEONARD

Of course I won't.

OLIVE

There! Everything is all right again. [*Tries to smile.*] Just as if I hadn't said anything.

LEONARD

[*Looks up at her.*] You are a brick, Olive. I feel such an awful——

OLIVE

[*Cutting in with a forced laugh.*] But you're *not*. You're my old companion, Len. It was so silly—— [*Laughs.*]—so *very* silly of me to think you could ever be anything else.

[*The voices of the others returning sound clearly through the open windows.*]

OLIVE

[*Gives a little mournful smile, LEONARD goes up R. C. a little.*]

I have to go back to my mustn'ts", to my "Yes, Mother", and "No, Mother". You're the only one I've ever had a chance to really talk to. I'm only allowed to listen at home. [*Brightly.*] Don't be cross with me, Len. [*Gives him a little playful tap on the shoulder.*] Bless you!

[*Runs out to meet the others.*]

ACT I: BOYHOOD

[LEONARD stares after her, entirely wretched. He shrivels into himself, and sits, beating one hand against the other, his lips moving, but no sound coming from them.]

[SYLVIA, SAXON and BROOKE reappear on porch and enter the room, OLIVE and Mrs. Hood following.]

SAXON

We can't all be good-lookers. So what's the use of being sensitive? At this particular dinner-party, I was given the most beautiful woman in the room as my *vis-à-vis*. She also had a tongue like a wasp. A sting in every word. When the signal was given to gather up yer partners, I approached the Jezebel solemnly and extended my arm. She took one look at me and went off into peals of rich and exuberant merriment. The procession halted to see the fun. When she recovered her breath she beamed down on me and said in her beautiful silvery voice: "Oh, you *beautiful little man*."

BROOKE

[*Laughing.*] What did you do?

SAXON

Do? Led the laughter. What *was* there to do? Take yer medicine, when ye get a jolt below the belt like that from a dainty morsel of femininity. If ye're small and ugly ye get a facer once in a while. But look at what ye miss. No one ever tries to run away with ye. Ye live in a kind of splendid isolation.

Fancy anyone tempting me! [*To Mrs. Hood.*] Can you?

THE HARP OF LIFE

BROOKE

Poor old Godfrey!

MRS. HOOD

[*Looking loftily at SAXON, turns to OLIVE.*] Why didn't you come with us? [*Looks across at LEONARD.*]

Ah! [*Purses her lips.*] I know. [*Nods sagaciously at LEONARD and shakes finger at him.*] Wanted to steal a chat without an eye on you. Naughty! Naughty!

[*LEONARD turns abruptly away and goes to meet SYLVIA. MRS. HOOD turns to OLIVE and pinches her ear with as much sign of affection as it is possible for her to show.*]

Was it a pleasant little talk?

OLIVE

[*Softly, her eyes averted.*] Yes, mother.

MRS. HOOD

[*Laughs harshly.*] You're a little rogue, aren't you?

OLIVE

[*Almost in tears.*] No, mother.

MRS. HOOD

Yes you are.

BROOKE

Sylvia, we must dine early. [*To LEONARD.*] We're going to the theatre.

LEONARD

[*Hurriedly.*] I can't.

BROOKE

[*Frowning.*] Why not?

ACT I: BOYHOOD

LEONARD

I promised to dine in town. Quite a long time ago. Mother knows.

BROOKE

[*Growing angry.*] Nonsense! You come with us.

LEONARD

[*Doggedly.*] I can't.

BROOKE

[*With increasing anger.*] Now, look here——

SYLVIA

[*Interposing.*] My dear! He must go in by the four-something—[*To LEONARD.*] Have you remembered what?

LEONARD

[*Takes out time-table from his pocket.*] No. I'll look it up.

BROOKE

You ought to have known better than make an appointment for to-night.

SYLVIA

It really doesn't matter.

BROOKE

Yes, it does. I wanted him with us.

SYLVIA

Still, an old engagement——

BROOKE

[*To LEONARD.*] With whom are you dining, that makes it so important?

THE HARP OF LIFE

LEONARD

[*Evasively.*] A few friends. I wouldn't think of going only it's quite an old thing.

BROOKE

[*Quite annoyed, turns to SYLVIA.*] Suppose we exchange the seats? You'd like him with us?

SYLVIA

Oh, yes. Let us change them.

BROOKE

[*To LEONARD, sarcastically.*] Are you free *to-morrow* night?

LEONARD

Oh, yes. It's just to-night. It's a very *old* affair. *Very* old.

BROOKE

It must be. It ages every time you mention it.

LEONARD

[*Finding place in time-table.*] Here we are—four—eighteen. [*Looks at clock.*] I've just got ten minutes.

MRS. HOOD

[*Has been watching and listening. Leers at LEONARD.*] We'll take you to the train.

LEONARD

[*Annoyed.*] Thank you, no. It's only a step.

MRS. HOOD

[*With an air of proprietorship.*] You'll come with us. We'll see you don't miss it. [*To SYLVIA, who comes*

ACT I: BOYHOOD

down to meet her.] I suppose you'll be looking just the same when we all come round next year.

SYLVIA

I hope so. But come round before that.

BROOKE

Must you really go? [*Eagerly taking her hand and manœuvring her in the direction of the door.*]

MRS. HOOD

I *mustn't*, but I'm going.

SAXON

[*Bowing courteously.*] Dear lady, you will leave a vacancy that no one else can fill.

MRS. HOOD

[*Looks at him indignantly, then calls.*] Olive! Leonard!

[*OLIVE goes out past her mother, her eyes down.*

LEONARD goes after her, making apologies to SYLVIA, who follows them out. MRS. HOOD draws herself up, looks scornfully at SAXON, who has been holding the door open, and goes out too.]

SAXON

[*Looks at BROOKE and shudders.*] There goes the most advanced argument in favor of celibacy—sans beauty, figure, voice, charity, womanliness.

BROOKE

You don't leave her much.

THE HARP OF LIFE

SAXON

Not a damn thing.

BROOKE

You needn't go?

SAXON

Not immediately.

BROOKE

[*Placing cigars and drinks on table.*] Stay to dinner?
[SYLVIA *re-enters.*]

SAXON

Can't. Much obliged.

SYLVIA

You shouldn't tease Elizabeth. It isn't nice. [*Pats BROOKE.*] I love my present.

BROOKE

[*Frowning.*] I wanted you to wear it to-night.

SYLVIA

I will—at dinner.

BROOKE

I mean at the theatre. It's most irritating, Leonard going away like that. Annoying.

SYLVIA

Oh, nonsense! Don't be always finding fault with him.

BROOKE

It's only because of you. I can see you're hurt.

SYLVIA

I'm nothing of the kind. *Hurt*, indeed! Nothing Leonard could do would hurt me.

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BROOKE

Now, you know perfectly well that you——

SYLVIA

I don't want to hear any more about it. I'm not hurt.
[*Hurries out very angry.*]

BROOKE

[*Distressed.*] Sylvia!

[*More loudly.*] Sylvia!

[*SYLVIA re-enters.*] Come here!

[*She goes to him, he takes her hand.*] I've never voluntarily spent an hour away from you, and I can't understand Leonard doing it. Am I forgiven?

SYLVIA

[*Relenting.*] Of course. [*Smiles.*] You're a funny old dear. [*To SAXON.*] No clubs! No gambling! No small graces for other women! Just me! I'm his virtue and his vice. Oh, the experiences this man has robbed me of! [*SAXON chuckles.*]

BROOKE

What do you mean?

SYLVIA

When other men have admired me his supreme goodness has kept me straight.

BROOKE

[*To SAXON.*] She does talk more rot——

SAXON

That isn't rot.

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SYLVIA

No indeed. They've realized rivalry wasn't possible this side of heaven. When I've seen some Adonis leave my side discouraged at his perfection, I've longed to cry out to him, "Do come back. My husband beats me at times".

BROOKE

When you make these revelations are you teasing me or telling the truth?

SYLVIA

What do you think?

BROOKE

I wonder.

SYLVIA

[*Patting his face.*] That's exactly the right answer for a husband. [*Goes laughing out of the room.*]

SAXON

You've got a marvellous wife.

BROOKE

I know that.

SAXON

This is the only home I go to that gives me a funny little stab here—[*Touches his heart*—]—where my heart ought to be. You're henpecked, and you seem to like it.

BROOKE

I do. Whatever Sylvia does is always right. I put her first. She, womanlike, puts Leonard. I think she spoils him. She thinks he can't be spoilt. The only times we ever disagree are about him. And I always end by giving in.

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SAXON

Happy is the man who has a wife *worth* giving in to! I wish I'd had one. Look what marriage made of me. A damned, silly, gossipy, old mountebank! Anything for a laugh! I make jokes at funerals in case someone thinks I take 'em seriously. Plantin' ye in the ground's one o' the best jokes I know. I can't bear anyone to think I take anything seriously. Pinkie did that. I was so afraid I'd be laughed at for marryin' her, that I laugh at everyone—includin' myself, *first*. Took a bit o' doin' jokin' about Pinkie. She was the most expensive one I struck.

BROOKE

Is she alive?

SAXON

Pinkie alive? Oh yes. Still roamin' about, poor old thing. She's touched up her hair, squeezed in her waist, an' married a wine man. Not a bad fellow! Flashy little rat! I see 'em in the restaurants sometimes. Poor Pinkie! Gettin' fatter every minute. A couple o' chins now. She wears high emerald collarettes. All out o' wine. They cover the chins and make the skin look white. Back and front cut very low. Have ye ever noticed that the older some women get the more *décollête* they like to be?

BROOKE

I can quite see the reason—the back is the last place to wrinkle.

THE HARP OF LIFE

SAXON

Exactly. Funny, ain't it? I like watching 'em. Pinkie's quite a good-looker still. Nice reg'lar features. Have ye ever noticed that people with nice reg'lar features are sometimes most irreg'lar in their conduct? Fact! Give me the small, ugly ones with no features to speak of. They last longer, do more and have less to regret. Look at me! My life's an open book. Only no one wants to read it. Heigho! You drew Sylvia! I picked Pinkie! Lo' bless us. [*Drinks.*]

BROOKE

Still you have your boy.

SAXON

[*Looks at him curiously and stops drinking.*] My boy? Oh yes. I have him. There again you have the pull on me. Your lad is straight as a die—at least he looks it.

BROOKE

He is.

SAXON

It's the mother in him. [*BROOKE laughs.*] Yes, it is. Ormonde never had one. She bolted when he was three. Pretty tough handicap on a kid.

BROOKE

What are you going to do with him?

SAXON

Do with him? Not a damn thing. He has a good seat on a pony an' can dance with the best. *He* has nice reg'lar features, too. Takes after Pinkie. If it

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came to a pinch he might give ridin' lessons or teach the tango. But that would seem too much like *work*. He'd hate to get *paid* for doin' anythin'.

BROOKE

How long are you going to allow that?

SAXON

I don't allow it. He does it. He's havin' his fling and I'm footin' the bills. Leonard hasn't started that racket yet, has he?

BROOKE

He hasn't that kind of nature.

SAXON

How do ye know?

BROOKE

I ought to.

SAXON

But *do* ye? There's not a great deal of difference in boys' natures, take 'em in the rough. They're all little animals. An' that's the way to treat 'em. Like horses. Ye don't try to *teach* a colt not to be vicious. Ye *work* it out of him. Same with lads. Work it out of 'em. Give 'em rope. If ye *don't* they'll take it without yer leave an' run into all kinds of mischief.

BROOKE

They're the exceptions. Most boys are healthy-minded where the home influence is good.

SAXON

[*With a little harsh, cackling laugh.*] Because he rackets about do ye think Ormonde an exception?

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[*Laughs loudly.*] If ever a boy was *not* exceptional, he's Ormonde. He's ordinary. Damn ordinary. One of ten thousand. The good an' bad all jumbled up waitin' for time an' experience to sort it out. It's about him I came to see ye.

BROOKE

Oh?

SAXON

He has his yacht in commission an' starts off in a day or two for Norway. Struck me it'd be a nice trip for Leonard. Give him an idea or two for his brush. What do ye say?

BROOKE

It's very kind of you, Godfrey——

SAXON

No, it isn't. It's a whale of a big boat an' it'd be nice for Ormonde. Send him along.

BROOKE

He always spends his holidays with us.

SAXON

Give him a *real* one for a change with some of his own age. Knock the nonsense out of him.

BROOKE

[*Decidedly.*] No. Time enough for that.

SAXON

I see. Moth-balls and camphor. Pah! Give him air an' license. That'll keep the moth out an' the blood circulatin'. A couple of months' travel 'ud be an encyclopedia to him. Might paint a hell of a picture.

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BROOKE

[*Finally.*] No.

SAXON

Right ye are, old pal. I suppose ye'll take him out o' cotton-wool some day an' marry him off young to some innocent, bless her little heart, an' they'll prattle baby-talk, the little dears. [*Helps himself to another drink.*] My dad married *me* off young—to Pinkie. He'd 'a' done me a much better turn if he'd turned me loose an' let me look 'em over before I'd pitched my tent. I wouldn't have come such a purler if I'd known who's who. [*Shudders.*] *What* a cropper I came. [*Quizzingly.*] Don't ye think the midnight sun, an' sweet music, with a grey eye or so at hand, better for Leonard than a family trip to an overrun waterin'-place?

BROOKE

[*Loudly.*] No. I do *not*!

SAXON

Don't bark at a pal. It ain't friendly.

BROOKE

I don't want the good of all these years under *our* influence dissipated by contact with young wasters, whose only occupation is sponging on their parents. Living useless, vicious, degenerate lives. Corrupt themselves and corrupting others. I want to keep Leonard away from them. [*Telephone bell rings. Brooke goes to it and takes the receiver.*] Hello! Who is it? . . . Oh! *You!* Where are you, Leonard? . . .

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What's the matter? . . . Is the train late? . . . I see. . . . Yes, yes. . . . [*Listens impatiently, then angrily.*] You'll do nothing of the kind. . . You come back by the last train.

SYLVIA

[*Comes into the room, having changed from her riding-habit to a charming summer dress. She goes to her husband.*] Is that Len?

BROOKE

[*Into telephone.*] Wait a minute. Here's your mother. [*Turns to SYLVIA.*] He thinks he may have to stay in town tonight. The idea! [*Into phone.*] You—catch—that—last—train——

SYLVIA

[*Puts her hand over his mouth.*] Ssh! Ssh!

BROOKE

[*Into phone.*] Hold on.

[*Gives SYLVIA telephone and strides angrily about.*]

SYLVIA

Hello, dear! . . . Yes, it's me. . . . It's your marm. [*BROOKE bangs angrily on table.*] Ssh! Stop your noise. . . . Where are you? . . . I see. . . . Yes, yes. Oh! Well, try to catch it. . . . They won't keep you as late as all that. Please try. Do. . . . No, you won't disturb us at all. [*BROOKE again bangs angrily.*] All right. [*Smiling.*] Of course I understand. [*BROOKE again bangs angrily.*] It's your father throwing things. . . . We're not afraid of him, are we? We

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know he loves us. [BROOKE gives an angry movement.]
Try to. . . Yes, if you *don't* come I'll understand.
[BROOKE goes to take receiver. SYLVIA calls hurriedly.] Look out! Good-bye.

[Hangs up receiver before BROOKE can take it. He takes telephone, quickly removes the receiver but finds he has been cut off.]

BROOKE

Hello—hello—hello—Leonard! Damn! They've cut him off. [Replaces telephone.]

SYLVIA

He was afraid we'd be waiting up in case he missed the last train.

BROOKE

[Exasperated.] He *mustn't* miss it.

SYLVIA

Of course he won't.

SAXON

Hasn't he a latch-key?

SYLVIA

Oh, yes. Ever so long. But he rarely has to use it. We're always up.

SAXON

Hasn't he ever stayed out all night?

SYLVIA

Never.

SAXON

[Smiles suggestively.] That'll come. It will. [To BROOKE.] 'Won't it?

THE HARP OF LIFE

BROOKE

[*Severely.*] I wish you wouldn't judge every boy by your own.

SYLVIA

But supposing he *did* stay out? What of it? Where would be the harm?

SAXON

None in the world. It would be educational. Eh?
[*To BROOKE.*]

SYLVIA

Why?

BROOKE

He feels that degradation is a necessary part of a boy's life.

SYLVIA

Do you?

SAXON

Well, they have to learn things sooner or later. The sooner the wiser.

SYLVIA

You're perfectly right. Marshall doesn't think boys should be told certain things. I do.

SAXON

You've the right idea. The home-beautiful is idyllic until the boy starts out swimmin' by himself. If he's not taught the coast-line the first nasty rock he comes to, one with a woman beckoning him on to it, will wreck him. The dear old primal instinct, bless it! Up on the rocks he'll go. Then where's the value of yer home-beautiful? Eh, old friend?

ACT I: BOYHOOD

BROOKE

Leonard will never strike that rock.

SAXON

Why not? Most lads do. We can only warn 'em and tell 'em the first-aid-to-the-injured in case they go smash.

BROOKE

I don't believe in telling ugly truths to as sensitive a boy as Leonard.

SYLVIA

You're wrong, Marshall. Did you tell your son? [*To SAXON.*]

SAXON

Every little thing. Hid nothing from *that* up. [*Indicates a very small child.*] He always had an enquiring mind. Puzzled over his first worm for days. Saw Providence in it. . . . Now if a small boy has curiosity *and* a seeing-eye the ordinary routine of a living-day can be full of instruction. Add a garden with flowers and pet animals and his education can ripen amazingly. And the wise parent doesn't shirk ripenin' it. He takes advantage of every detail to broaden the little mind: stimulate the outlook. Then, when he's ready to go out and do battle, plant the final seed of warning.

SYLVIA

That is exactly what I want him to do with Leonard.

SAXON

Sometimes the family physician is helpful.

THE HARP OF LIFE

SYLVIA

It would come stronger from his father. [*Turning to BROOKE.*] Ah, my dear, I'm sure half the misery of young manhood would be avoided if boys were told before leaving their homes that they had three alternatives in their physical life. First, self-respect and a decent marriage. Second, a liaison in which a decent girl's life is tarnished or his own nature blunted by contact with a courtesan. Third, vice—hideous, unimaginative, repellant—with its aftermath of degradation. If we would bring up a race of clean-thinking men we'd hear less of the ruined girls.

[*BROOKE makes movement of annoyance.*]

SAXON

[*To BROOKE.*] She's right. [*To SYLVIA.*] How old is Leonard? He must be——

SYLVIA

Nineteen.

SAXON

The ripenin' age. A youth can pass from boyhood to adolescence and manhood in a day—just a day. Then there's no looking back. They must go on.

SYLVIA

[*Shivers at the thought.*] I told him as a child of the beauties of nature—love, motherhood, fatherhood. Marshall reserved the right to tell him as a man of the horrors that come through the abuse of nature. And so far he's shirked it.

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BROOKE

You know how I feel about it.

SYLVIA

Put his future above your sensitiveness.

SAXON

Sensitiveness, dear lady? *Squeamishness!*

BROOKE

If I were to tell him now he'd look for evil in everything.

SYLVIA

He is bound to meet it.

BROOKE

[*Impatiently.*] We've argued like this before. I'll leave him his illusions a little longer.

SAXON

[*Drily.*] Suppose he hasn't any *now*?

SYLVIA

[*Hotly.*] Indeed he has.

SAXON

I wish my old Dad had dropped me a word o' warnin'. But no. "Let him find things out for himself," he thought. And I did. I found 'em all right. *And* Pinkie! [*To BROOKE*] If you hadn't met Sylvia where would *you* have landed? Eh? Leonard may not be so lucky. Wait till ye see the kind he picks out.

THE HARP OF LIFE

SYLVIA

Oh, we think we know whom Leonard will marry. We hope it will be Olive.

SAXON

Really! The little chicken? [SYLVIA *nods.*] A very sweet girl. Keep the mother away or she'll spoil the romance. Dear me! I wish Ormonde'd pick out some nice girl like Olive.

SYLVIA

But we're not sure about Olive, though we think they love each other.

SAXON

Youth is wonderful—tragic. Touchin'. Movin'. Pathetic! [*Suddenly.*] If he misses his last train—an' I'll make a small wager he *will* miss it—where will he spend the night?

SYLVIA

With friends.

SAXON

Of his own age?

SYLVIA

And a little older.

SAXON

Ah! Then it's to them he'll go for knowledge if—[*to BROOKE*]*—you won't provide it. They know more about his real thoughts than either of ye.*

SYLVIA

[*Indignantly.*] Indeed they do not.

SAXON

[*To BROOKE.*] You?

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BROOKE

I agree with Sylvia.

SAXON

Very well, then. I congratulate ye both on havin' such a charmin' an' *virtuous* son. May history repeat itself—like parents, like children! I only hope as Olive grows older she don't favor her mother. That'd be a tragedy. Now I must run. Good-bye, Sylvia. May all your birthdays find you just as young, with greater beauty, and even more marvellous. [BROOKE goes to see him off.] 'Bye, old sour-face.

BROOKE

You do talk a lot of rot.

SAXON

O' course I do. Ain't I an old mountebank?

BROOKE

You look at life cross-eyed.

SAXON

[*Going out on to porch.*] You don't look at life at all. [*Turns to SYLVIA, and kisses his fingers to her.*] Y'r servant, Sylvia. [*Goes out, followed by BROOKE.*] [*SYLVIA waves from window, goes to table, puts flowers in vase, humming a tune happily. Takes old flowers on to porch and throws them away. As she re-enters BROOKE also comes in. SYLVIA goes to table, takes vase, and puts it on piano, takes a red rose from bouquet. BROOKE walks down to table very serious, with brows knit. SYLVIA laughs lightly.*]

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SYLVIA

What on old cynic Godfrey is!
[*Putting the rose in her hair.*]

BROOKE

[*Testily.*] Isn't he?
[*Gets legal bag from desk, brings it to table, opens it, and takes out papers.*]

SYLVIA

[*Looks quickly at him.*] What's the matter? Are you cross?

BROOKE

I'm sorry you spoke like that—before him. I'd rather you didn't mention that subject before anyone else.

SYLVIA

I won't. But you *will* promise——?

BROOKE

[*Angrily.*] Yes! Yes! Yes!

SYLVIA

[*Goes to him and laughs.*] You're a very curious person. When you are overcome with affection for Leonard or me you always bark loudly. [*Laughs again as she remembers.*] Even on our wedding-trip I'd look across the table at you and you'd look back at me like a shy, happy boy, and then suddenly the love-mist would fade from your eyes and you'd snap, "Look out, Sylvia, the head-waiter's watching us."

BROOKE

[*Kisses her hand.*] You're a sweet woman, dear.

ACT I: BOYHOOD

SYLVIA

You promise me you'll speak to Leonard?

BROOKE

Oh, very well.

SYLVIA

[*After a pause. Goes to window.*] Shall we go out for a while? The air's delicious.

BROOKE

[*Reading legal papers.*] I want to read these before dinner.

SYLVIA

Marshall!

BROOKE

Yes?

SYLVIA

Fancy! I'm thirty-six today.

BROOKE

[*Softening.*] No one would believe it.

SYLVIA

That's because I've been happy.

BROOKE

Is it?

SYLVIA

[*Nods.*] I was lucky—I found *you*.

BROOKE

So was I—I found *you*.

SYLVIA

[*Smiling happily.*] And we found Leonard.

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BROOKE

Yes.

SYLVIA

[*With a sigh of happiness, sits on sofa.*] Heigho! It's beautiful to be a happy wife! It's wonderful to be an adoring mother! [*After a little while.*] Marshall! [*He turns and looks at her, she points to the rose in her hair.*] Like it?

BROOKE

Very nice. Very nice indeed.

[*Turns back to papers.*]

SYLVIA

"Very nice indeed!" We must remember not to lock the door to-night.

BROOKE

Why?

SYLVIA

In case he has forgotten his latch-key and catches the last train.

BROOKE

Oh, yes.

SYLVIA

[*Takes book and goes to sofa.*] I hope he *does* catch it.

BROOKE

He *will*. I told him to.

SYLVIA

Oh! Then of course he will catch it. Marshall!

BROOKE

Yes?

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SYLVIA

Shall we sit up for Leonard?

BROOKE

Certainly not. Why should we?

SYLVIA

I don't know. It's so lonely coming into an empty room—at night.

BROOKE

I'm not going to wait up.

SYLVIA

[*Laughing.*] Very well. I will. I'll exercise one of my privileges as a mother, and wait up.

[*She reads for a moment, then looks up, smiling happily. BROOKE pores over his papers with knit brows.*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

The same. The following morning.

SYLVIA, *pale, tired and anxious, is seated on the sofa unwrapping a package. She discovers a purple photo-frame. She smiles wanly, removes LEONARD'S photograph from the old pink and grey frame and places it in the new one. BROOKE comes in, very pre-occupied and goes to the table and collects legal papers which he places in a brief-bag, unconsciously leaving one printed page on the table. He counts his papers and finds that one is missing. He crashes the brief-case down on the table, covering the missing paper, crosses angrily to writing desk and noisily pulls and closes all the drawers.*

The moment he comes in SYLVIA sings cheerily to cover any trace of her too-obvious dejection.

SYLVIA

Have you lost something?

BROOKE

[*Irritably.*] There's a page missing—a printed page. I had it here last night. I suppose it has been tidied into one of these drawers. I wish the maids would

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

leave things where I put them, so that I could find them in the morning.

[Pulling drawers out violently.]

SYLVIA

[Lifting up case and discovering missing page.] Is this it?

BROOKE

Yes. Where did you find it?

[With drawer in hand.]

SYLVIA

Under your bag.

BROOKE

[Smiles; he is quite relieved.] You wonderful woman!

SYLVIA

[Hands him the paper, takes the drawer from him and replaces it in desk.] Won't you be late?

BROOKE

[Placing the printed page in the bag.] No. I'm not in court until the afternoon. The case may not even be called to-day. I'll go in by the "eleven o'clock." You were singing.

SYLVIA

[Smiles brightly at him.] Thank you! Do you think so?

[Sings again.]

BROOKE

[Taking her chin in his hand.] How tired you're looking! You shouldn't have waited up for Leonard last night. You're feeling better?

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THE HARP OF LIFE

SYLVIA

Oh, much! How different everything seems in the morning with the sun shining! Last night I was full of forebodings.

[*She laughs and shivers.*]

BROOKE

Are all your forebodings gone?

SYLVIA

[*Nods.*] Every one. When I read Leonard's telegram they all melted.

BROOKE

By the way, where *is* that telegram?

SYLVIA

It's upstairs. Poor boy! Here we were blaming him for not telephoning, and the wretched line out of order all the time!

BROOKE

It's very odd. It was all right at this end.

SYLVIA

I mean at *his* end. How worried he must have been!

BROOKE

He must have been! What about *us*?

SYLVIA

Yes. We did worry. I'm glad we haven't got six.

BROOKE

Still, he ought to have told us where he was going to be.

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

SYLVIA

Now I come to think of it, he *did* try to tell me something over the telephone, but I kept insisting on his trying to catch the last train. So it was all my fault.

BROOKE

You always try to make excuses for him.

SYLVIA

Oh, well, that's part of a mother's business. Poor Leonard! All this to-do because he dares to spend a night away from the family wing! No wonder some people marry young! I believe you only married me to get away from home and be able to have your own way. And you've never had your own way, poor dear! . . . You've promised me you will speak to Leonard.

BROOKE

I'll bring him back with me this afternoon. Leave us alone for a while after dinner.

SYLVIA

[*Smiles.*] All right, dear. [BROOKE goes out. SYLVIA watches him go out, and all her brightness dies away. She suddenly becomes grave and stands a moment thinking. She dismisses the thought with a sigh, mounts the ladder and changes the old flowers for the new, humming again as she does so. LEONARD runs up on to the porch and comes in through the window. As soon as he sees her he stops and stands silent and embarrassed. SYLVIA hurries joyfully down the ladder.] Oh, Leonard! I thought you might come.

THE HARP OF LIFE

LEONARD

[*His eyes averted.*] I've just time to change.

SYLVIA

[*Feels the rebuff and watches him closely.*] Is *that* why you came home?

LEONARD

Eh? [*Quickly.*] Oh! And to see you, of course. [*Looks at her, then turns away.*] You weren't worried about—last night, were you?

SYLVIA

[*Slowly. Very disappointed.*] Worried? No, not a bit.

LEONARD

[*Very much relieved.*] Father's gone, I suppose?

SYLVIA

Not yet. You can go in together.

LEONARD

[*Visibly embarrassed.*] Oh! [*Nervously.*] Is he—fussy, about—last night?

SYLVIA

No. I arranged that. You sent me a telegram—which you didn't—and the telephone was out of order—which it wasn't. So your father wasn't worried.

LEONARD

[*Relieved again, but rather ashamed.*] Thank you. That's all right.

SYLVIA

We did rather expect you.

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

LEONARD

But I warned you on the phone.

SYLVIA

Still, we thought you *might* try to catch it.

LEONARD

[*Irritably.*] You know what parties are. [*Turns away to avoid his mother's look. Sees the new frame on mantelpiece. Quickly changes the subject.*] Oh, that's come. The rest ought to be here to-morrow or the next day. [*Looking at the screen and bowl.*] How much better the room looks, doesn't it?

SYLVIA

[*Noticing his nervousness, goes over to him.*] Did you enjoy yourself?

LEONARD

[*Embarrassed.*] Eh? Oh, yes. Pretty well.

SYLVIA

What did you do, play cards?

LEONARD

No. I hate cards. I always lose.

SYLVIA

Just talked?

LEONARD

[*Hesitating.*] We—a—went to a theatre.

SYLVIA

Oh! What did you see?

LEONARD

"The Isle of Palms." Comic-opera thing.

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THE HARP OF LIFE

SYLVIA

Any good?

LEONARD

Not very. Rather trashy. Tinkle-y music and a wretched book.

SYLVIA

What a pity!

LEONARD

Oh, I liked it all right. Some jolly dancing.

SYLVIA

Any pretty girls?

LEONARD

[*Laughs uneasily.*] A few. *Very* few.

SYLVIA

Dressed in purple?

LEONARD

[*Hesitates. Smiles—turns away from her.*] Don't be silly.

SYLVIA

[*Arranging his tie.*] Let me fix your tie. Did you miss me?

LEONARD

[*Without looking at her.*] Of course.

SYLVIA

[*Half-chaffing.*] You always do. Don't you?

LEONARD

Rather!

[*Tries to get away.*]

SYLVIA

[*Struggling with the tie.*] Were there many of you?

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ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

LEONARD

No.

[*Uneasy under her inquisition.*]

SYLVIA

Do I know them?

LEONARD

[*Very embarrassed.*] They've never been down here.

SYLVIA

From the art-school?

LEONARD

[*Half choked by his mother's fingers.*] Look out!
[*Releases himself.*] I'll finish it. I'm going to change it, anyway.

SYLVIA

Your father's going in by the "eleven o'clock."
You've plenty of time.

LEONARD

[*Indicating his clothes.*] But these—I wore them yesterday.

SYLVIA

Don't you *want* to talk to me?

LEONARD

Of course I do. [*Goes to her.*] What a funny question!

SYLVIA

I didn't sleep much last night, Leonard.

[*Takes his hand.*]

LEONARD

Why not? [*Scenting trouble, he takes away his hand*

THE HARP OF LIFE

and looks at her warily, prepared to defend himself.]
Because I stayed out?

SYLVIA

[Quite hurt. Quietly.] It wasn't that—altogether.
[Smiles wistfully at him.] I lay awake last night, Len,
wondering what this will be like when you're gone.

LEONARD

[Starts. Looks at her with distended eyes.] Gone?

SYLVIA

Yes. When you're married. *[He turns away from her.]* It will be pretty lonely for me then, won't it?
[Watches him closely.] I wonder if I can guess what
you are thinking?

LEONARD

[Defiantly, turning to her.] I don't think you can.

SYLVIA

I wonder?

LEONARD

What am I thinking?

SYLVIA

Aren't your thoughts of marriage?

LEONARD

[Hesitates; then boldly.] Yes.

SYLVIA

I knew it.

LEONARD

How did you know?

SYLVIA

You have had something on your mind for weeks. At

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

times—like yesterday—you've almost told me. Haven't you?

LEONARD

Yes.

SYLVIA

You are in love?

LEONARD

Yes.

SYLVIA

You are bad at keeping secrets. After all, why have one from me? And such a vital one? Have you told—Olive—you love her?

LEONARD

[*Turns to her.*] Olive? Oh, it's not Olive.

SYLVIA

[*Looks at him curiously, without surprise.*] It's not Olive? You're in love, and it's not Olive? Who is it, then?

LEONARD

[*Avoiding her look.*] You've never met her.

SYLVIA

Why haven't I met her?

LEONARD

I've not known her very long.

SYLVIA

How long?

LEONARD

A few weeks.

SYLVIA

So love has come to you!

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LEONARD

Yes, mother.

SYLVIA

I'm sure she's very beautiful.

LEONARD

[*Eagerly.*] She is.

SYLVIA

[*Wistfully.*] You'll never think me pretty any more.

LEONARD

[*Distressed.*] Of course I will.

SYLVIA

I am to lose my admirer—my play-fellow—my son.

LEONARD

Don't say that. I'll always love you and admire you. Always. Really, I will.

SYLVIA

That was why you didn't kiss me when you came in. You need *her* kisses—*her* hands—*her* voice. [*Sits forlornly on the lounge.*] I seem suddenly to have grown old. Quite, quite old.

[*Beating one hand against the other—her face drawn.*]

LEONARD

[*Quite distressed, bends over her.*] You have so often said it would come. And you have laughed and joked about it.

SYLVIA

I know. But now that it *has*, I can't just grasp it. It—it hurts. I haven't even seen her. Perhaps it's

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

because I don't know her. That must be it. [*Tries to smile.*] Because you found her for yourself. It must be jealousy. You've met someone so much prettier than I am and you love her, oh, so much more than you do me. That's it. Jealousy. [*Struggles to get complete control of herself and talk in a matter-of-fact way.*] Tell me about her. What is her name?

LEONARD

Mrs. Vorona.

[*It slips out. He looks frightenedly at his mother, then turns away.*]

SYLVIA

[*Looks at him in amazement. Goes over to him.*] Mrs.?

LEONARD

[*As if correcting himself.*] Zeila Vorona.

SYLVIA

She's been married?

LEONARD

Yes.

SYLVIA

A widow?

LEONARD

No. She's been divorced.

SYLVIA

[*As if afraid to ask further questions.*] Is she quite young?

LEONARD

No. Not quite. But what does that matter?

SYLVIA

You frighten me.

THE HARP OF LIFE

LEONARD

Why?

SYLVIA

[*Suddenly, as if thrusting a terrifying thought from her, she cries out:*] Oh, no! That would be too horrible! Too horrible!!

LEONARD

Horrible! Why? [*Hotly.*] She's everything that's fine and splendid. Because she made a mistake and married when she was too young to know what men are—*some* men—must her whole life be spoilt?

SYLVIA

No. Of course not. Where did you meet her?

LEONARD

One of my chums took me.

SYLVIA

Took you?

LEONARD

Well? What's so very extraordinary in that?

SYLVIA

Nothing. Only——. So one of your chums took *you* to call on her and you fell in love with her?

LEONARD

Yes.

SYLVIA

And she with you?

LEONARD

I think so.

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

SYLVIA

Why didn't you tell me then? I would have understood, and sympathised, and helped you. You know that.

LEONARD

I don't know. One doesn't talk about *everything*.

SYLVIA

You used to.

LEONARD

It seemed too sacred. Besides, I didn't know until yesterday whether she really cared for me. I couldn't talk about it—to anyone.

SYLVIA

Not even to me? I've been young too, Leonard. Don't hide anything from me.

LEONARD

[*Ashamed, half whispers.*] I'm sorry, Mother. It was rotten of me. I feel that now. . . . I couldn't bring myself to say anything until I was sure she cared. That's the real reason.

SYLVIA

And you've asked her to marry you?

LEONARD

Yes.

SYLVIA

She's consented?

LEONARD

Yes. But only after a lot of bother. It's wretched being so young. But I made her understand. Age

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doesn't count when one's in love. It was really splendid of her to accept me—fine of her. She's wonderful.

SYLVIA

[*Thinking.*] When did you ask her?

LEONARD

Last night.

SYLVIA

So when I was waiting for you—hoping even to hear your voice on that telephone—you had already asked someone I have never met to marry you. You had no thought of me then, had you? You never meant to catch the last train, did you?

LEONARD

Don't make it too hard for me.

SYLVIA

Oh, I didn't mean to talk like a mother.

LEONARD

You'd have been all smiles and congratulations if it had been Olive.

SYLVIA

Yes, Leonard, I would. You're both children. You'd have begun life together. She'd have given you her *first* love. But a woman who is not quite young and has been married——

LEONARD

[*Angrily.*] Well? And if she has? Lots of men marry *widows*. Would you have objected if *she* had been?

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

SYLVIA

It's all so different from what I hoped.

LEONARD

It's wretched to be doubted—and suspected—and——

SYLVIA

[*All pity.*] I don't doubt you. I am sure that, next to *me*—she is the very best woman to make you happy. [*Wistfully.*] There. Don't be cross with your poor old mother.

LEONARD

[*Relieved.*] You will be nice to her when you meet her, won't you?

SYLVIA

Why, Len, isn't she going to be my daughter?

LEONARD

Your daughter? [*Looks strangely at her and repeats slowly.*] Your daughter! How funny that sounds! You don't look any older than she does.

SYLVIA

Don't I?

LEONARD

No. [*Suddenly.*] Oh, she's had such a miserable life. It's wretched for *some* women, isn't it?

SYLVIA

[*Looking intently at him.*] It *must* be—for *some* women.

LEONARD

You don't know much of the world. Father's kept

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you away from it. And a good thing, too! It's not nice for a woman. A *man* sees it all. He's in the thick of it.

SYLVIA

Are *you* in the thick of it?

LEONARD

[*With affected manliness.*] Oh, yes! Rather! I've heard some dreadful things lately—awful things.

SYLVIA

I was afraid you would.

LEONARD

One can't be a molly-coddle always—especially when one's out in life. Really in life. You have to rub shoulders with people and hear things. Makes you pretty sick, though—at first.

SYLVIA

[*Her heart sinking.*] It must.

LEONARD

[*Goes on impulsively.*] Still! There's no use blinking. You've got to look life straight in the face—when you're a man. But it does give you a rotten feeling—at first. You know—as if you'd lost something. [*With a sudden burst of revelation, as he sits on arm of sofa, facing SYLVIA.*] One of the chaps told me that—[*BROOKE enters, stops when he sees LEONARD and stands looking at him with knit brows.*] Good morning, Father. [*Half-defiantly.*]

BROOKE

[*Walks across to him. SYLVIA rises and watches anxiously, ready to intervene.*] In future, if you are

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

going to stay out, tell one of us where you are. Suppose your mother had been ill last night! I wouldn't have known where to reach you. Don't do that again.

LEONARD

[Faintly and sullenly, all the affected-manliness gone.]

All right.

BROOKE

Another thing. I didn't like your telephoning from the station. Why not have told us before you went?

LEONARD

I forgot to.

BROOKE

[Sharply.] What?

LEONARD

[Defiantly.] I tell you, I forgot to.

BROOKE

Wasn't it because you knew we'd ask you where you were going to spend the night?

LEONARD

No. It wasn't.

BROOKE

Where *did* you spend it?

LEONARD

With a friend.

BROOKE

Whom?

LEONARD

[Hesitates.] Atherley. Ned Atherley. I don't know why you take this tone with me.

THE HARP OF LIFE

BROOKE

Don't you? Then I'll tell you. It's the first time you've shown your mother such deliberate lack of consideration.

SYLVIA

Oh, come dear! He didn't——

BROOKE

[*Stops her. Continues to Leonard.*] It would have been a very little thing to have eased her mind by saying where you were going, and you wouldn't have lost a shred of manliness by doing it.

SYLVIA

Don't say that, dear. Really, he forgot. There were so many people here yesterday. It was quite natural.

LEONARD

[*Full of his wrongs.*] If I can't stay out *once* without all this——

BROOKE

You are at liberty to stay out whenever you please, but you must tell us where you are going. [*More gently.*] If you had seen her waiting here—hoping you'd come, or at least send a message where you were, and known her anxiety, I think you would be a little ashamed. Please don't do it again. [*Goes to table.*]

LEONARD

[*To SYLVIA.*] I'm very sorry. I didn't think you'd worry like that. I'm so sorry.

SYLVIA

That's all right, dear.

[*Motions him to escape while his father's back is*

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

turned to him. LEONARD goes softly to door and opens it.]

BROOKE

[Looks around just as LEONARD is going out.] No school to-day?

LEONARD

Oh, yes. I'll be a little late. I thought I'd come home to change first.

BROOKE

You needn't do that. Come along with me. I'm going now. *[Gathering up his papers.]*

LEONARD

[Anxious to avoid going in with his father.] But these! *[Indicating his clothes.]*

BROOKE

They're all right. I want to talk to you on the train. I'll catch the five this afternoon. *[To SYLVIA.]*

SYLVIA

[Nervously.] Very well, dear. A—perhaps he'd feel more comfortable in fresh things.

BROOKE

[Severely.] He looks quite well enough as he is. *[To LEONARD.]* Come on!

SYLVIA

You mustn't *keep* angry, dear. I thought it was all over.

BROOKE

[Smiles rather wearily.] I didn't mean to be. We're both on edge this morning. We all need a holiday. Could you be ready by Monday?

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SYLVIA

[*Joyfully.*] Oh, yes. Where shall we go?

BROOKE

We'll make it for *him* this year. [*Looking at LEONARD.*] I'll take him where he'll find new subjects for his brush. You'll come back with a full wallet, my lad.

SYLVIA

Where?

BROOKE

Spain.

SYLVIA

[*Delighted.*] I've always wanted to see Spain.

BROOKE

[*To LEONARD.*] Paint nature in her own colours. You'll do more there in two months than in a year at the school.

LEONARD

[*In dismay.*] *Two months?*

BROOKE

Perhaps a week or two longer. We'll see.

LEONARD

[*Very white and determined.*] I couldn't go away for two months—just now.

BROOKE

Why not?

LEONARD

I couldn't. [*Mutters.*] Not two months.

BROOKE

You can go on with your drawing just the same.

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

LEONARD

It isn't that.

BROOKE

What is it, then?

LEONARD

I can't go. That's all. I can't.

SYLVIA

[*Interposing to prevent a burst of anger from BROOKE.*] It will be very hot in Spain. Couldn't we go somewhere nearer?

BROOKE

[*Brows knit, looking keenly at LEONARD.*] Why don't you want to go?

LEONARD

[*Doggedly.*] I can't. And what's more, I *won't*.

BROOKE

[*Angrily.*] What's that?

LEONARD

[*Vehemently.*] I tell you, I *won't*.

BROOKE

I don't like your tone, my boy.

SYLVIA

Now, Marshall, dear——

LEONARD

[*To SYLVIA.*] He may as well know now as later.

[*To BROOKE.*] I'm going to be married.

BROOKE

[*Straightens up, looks at him for several seconds, then repeats in amazement.*] Married?

THE HARP OF LIFE

Yes.

LEONARD

When?

BROOKE

As soon as possible.

LEONARD

To whom?

BROOKE

To Zeila Vorona.

LEONARD

I don't know her.

BROOKE

I know that.

LEONARD

[*To SYLVIA.*] Do you?

BROOKE

SYLVIA

[*Quickly, anxious to smooth matters.*] Not yet. But I feel I do. He's told me so much about her.

When did he tell you?

BROOKE

Just now.

SYLVIA

[*To LEONARD.*] You asked her to marry you without consulting us?

BROOKE

Why shouldn't I?

LEONARD

BROOKE

[*Grimly.*] Exactly! Why shouldn't you? But, as a rule one is rather proud of the woman one is going to marry.

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

LEONARD

I am.

BROOKE

You must be! Very proud! To keep her hidden from your parents.

LEONARD

[*Hotly.*] I've only known her a few weeks.

BROOKE

And during those weeks you think so little of our interest in the woman you want to marry that you say nothing. Why? [*Waits.*] What's wrong, my boy?

LEONARD

Nothing's wrong.

BROOKE

You weren't going to tell me *now* if I hadn't suggested taking you away. Were you? [*Waits. Then loudly.*] *Were* you?

SYLVIA

[*Putting her hand on BROOKE's arm.*] Don't, dear! Don't!

BROOKE

Were you?

LEONARD

Yes. Later.

BROOKE

Oh! *Later!* When I became engaged to your mother I wanted everyone to know it.

SYLVIA

Don't make him feel badly.

BROOKE

Badly! How do you suppose *I* feel? How do we know who or what this woman is?

THE HARP OF LIFE

LEONARD

[*Furiously.*] She's just as good as my mother.

BROOKE

I hope so.

SYLVIA

[*Her arm protectingly around LEONARD.*] I'm sure she is.

LEONARD

[*Trembling with passion, trying to release himself.*] Why does he——?

SYLVIA

[*Holding him firmly.*] Don't, dear! Don't! [*To BROOKE.*] You mustn't be angry because he didn't tell us sooner. It's quite natural.

BROOKE

I don't think so. It seems most *unnatural* to me.

LEONARD

You didn't consult anyone, did you?

BROOKE

It isn't altogether that. Where there's nothing to be ashamed of there's nothing to conceal.

LEONARD

[*Excitedly.*] You've no right to think there's anything to conceal. I didn't speak sooner because I thought you'd make a fuss like this. And I *hate* scenes. There's nothing to hide. [*Almost in tears.*] I'm proud of her. Grateful to her. I love her.

[*SYLVIA tries to comfort him.*]

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

BROOKE

[*Watching him closely, allows the outburst to subside and then resumes his examination.*] So you didn't tell us before because you were frightened I'd make a fuss—a scene—eh?

LEONARD

Yes.

BROOKE

Was that your only reason?

LEONARD

What else?

BROOKE

I don't know "what else".

[*SYLVIA tries to intervene.*]

Wait a minute. [*To LEONARD.*] That's for you to say. Where does she live?

LEONARD

In town.

BROOKE

When are we to meet her?

LEONARD

Whenever you like.

BROOKE

The sooner the better.

LEONARD

All right.

BROOKE

This changes everything. Everything. [*Moves about restlessly. Stops in front of SYLVIA.*] What do you say? Disappointed?

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SYLVIA

[*Bravely: smiling cheerfully.*] Of course not. Why should I be? He loves her. He'll be happy. That's all I care.

BROOKE

I don't like it.

LEONARD

What don't you like? My choosing a wife, instead of having one chosen for me—by *you*?

SYLVIA

[*Checking him.*] Don't, Leonard! Don't!

LEONARD

[*Shaking himself free.*] Oh, it's awful, having everything done for you. Do, for Heaven's sake, let a man live his own life.

BROOKE

But you're not a man.

LEONARD

Are n't I? Then what constitutes manhood?

BROOKE

To have lived—loved—and suffered.

LEONARD

I love. And—[*Almost crying again.*—I'm suffering now. [*Covers his eyes.*]

SYLVIA

[*Compassionately.*] Oh, Leonard! Marshall! [*Looks piteously at BROOKE.*]

BROOKE

[*Goes to LEONARD, puts both his hands on the boy's shoulders.*] I see you are. I didn't want you to do that.

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

My doing—I've said things—the heat of the moment. It came as such a surprise. A shock. [*Shakes LEONARD in a kindly way.*] Sorry, old man.

LEONARD

[*Choking back his tears.*] You didn't think me capable of loving—did you?

BROOKE

No. I suppose I didn't. I fancy we've both thought of you as a child. [*To SYLVIA.*] Haven't we?

SYLVIA

[*Anxious to bring them together.*] And it was very stupid of us. We see now he's a *man*, don't we? [*Signs to BROOKE to agree with her.*]

BROOKE

[*Heartily.*] Of course we do. Well, we must get accustomed to the new conditions. [*To LEONARD.*] So your boyhood has gone?

LEONARD

Oh, quite.

BROOKE

From now on you want to be treated as a man.

LEONARD

Well, you see, when a fellow——

BROOKE

All right. All right. We'll do it. Have you no regrets?

LEONARD

For what?

BROOKE

The passing of your boyhood?

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LEONARD

No. None.

BROOKE

[*To SYLVIA.*] Doesn't that seem rather ungrateful—to *you*?

SYLVIA

[*Hurriedly, with a little forced laugh.*] Why, not at all. I'm happy in his happiness. [*To LEONARD.*] And *you are* happy, dear, aren't you?

LEONARD

[*Gasping miserably through half-sobs.*] Oh, yes. I'm—happier—than I ever thought I could be.
[*Turns away shamefacedly and wipes his eyes.*]

BROOKE

[*Looks at SYLVIA. She motions him to make it up.*] Don't take what I said the wrong way. You caught me unawares. I'm sure she's everything you think her. Sylvia and I will be just as proud of her as you are. There, my lad. All over. [*LEONARD rises and turns to face him.*] All gone.

LEONARD

[*His eyes cast down.*] I'm so ashamed—for saying the things I did—and losing my temper. Rotten thing of me to do. You've been so—splendid to me—always. A little rough on me now and again—and all that—but—on the whole—splendid. [*Looks up at BROOKE.*] Won't happen again. [*Holds out his hand.*] Let by-gones be by-gones. I will if you will.

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

BROOKE

[*Laughing heartily and gripping his hand.*] Well, that's very nice and generous of you, and I appreciate it. We've fought it out like a couple of *men*. Now we shake hands and throw away the gloves. [*Drops LEONARD's hand. Looks at his watch.*] Hello! We've missed the eleven o'clock. Run along and change. It'll cool you off and make you feel better. Go on.

LEONARD

[*Anxious to escape, runs out, gasping.*] I won't be long. I'll just change my tie.

BROOKE

[*Looks at SYLVIA, gives a gesture of hopelessness, sinks into chair, head in hands and sighs.*] What a pity! What a great pity!

SYLVIA

[*Shivers in spite of herself, goes to BROOKE.*] You mustn't feel that.

BROOKE

He's such a boy. A child.

SYLVIA

I know. Still——

BROOKE

Did he tell you anything about her?

SYLVIA

Very little. [*Quickly.*] It was all in her favour.

BROOKE

I'll get him to take me there to-day. I'll invite her down here this week-end.

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SYLVIA

But Leonard may not like to——

BROOKE

Why shouldn't he? [*Firmly.*] I'm going to meet her to-day.

SYLVIA

[*Sighs wearily.*] Very well.

BROOKE

[*Thinks: then regretfully.*] What a pity! He's *such* a boy.

SYLVIA

How old were you when you asked me to marry you?

BROOKE

Oh, I was twenty-one.

SYLVIA

Yes—an old man.

[*BROOKE laughs and pats her hand.*]

We were engaged for weeks before we told. Remember?

BROOKE

Yes. But I wanted to tell everyone.

SYLVIA

I didn't. I felt just the same as Leonard. It seemed too sacred to tell.

BROOKE

Well, I hope it turns out as happily, dear.

SYLVIA

[*Quickly.*] Oh, it will. Of course it will.

[*LEONARD hurries back. He has changed his collar*

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

and tie. He now wears a purple one. He picks up his hat. BROOKE and SYLVIA rise the moment he comes in. BROOKE goes toward door. SYLVIA meets LEONARD.]

[Looking at his tie.] Oh! Purple! Well, well! And, like Napoleon, you've wept over it! *[Rubs the spot with her handkerchief and pats his face.]* You really are a baby, Len.

LEONARD

[Protestingly.] I say, mother——

SYLVIA

Oh, it's only to me that you're a baby, and I won't tell anyone.

LEONARD

[Gets away quickly from her.] I'll catch the "five" as well, mother.

SYLVIA

All, right, dear.

[Goes down between them to say "Good-bye".]

BROOKE

[Has taken his hat from Ottoman, crosses to SYLVIA, kisses her left cheek.] Good-bye.

LEONARD

[Kisses her right cheek at the same time.] Good-bye.

SYLVIA

My two children.

BROOKE

H'm! Yes! *[Looks at watch and crosses to door.]* Bring my bag, Leonard.

THE HARP OF LIFE

[*They both go out. SYLVIA watches them through the open door. Stands thinking. Then she looks wistfully at the new purple frame and sighs. Then looks at the new screen and bowl and gives a hopeless, forlorn gesture. She closes up the step-ladder and takes it out on to porch. As she puts it down she sees someone in the distance. She waves and cries out:*

SYLVIA

Oh! Elizabeth! Don't go round to the door. Come in this way. [*Laughs.*] What a climb it is!

[*Mrs. Hood toils wearily onto the porch followed by OLIVE. Mrs. Hood is out of breath, flushed, and angry. OLIVE is pale and anxious. SYLVIA shakes hands with Mrs. Hood and kisses OLIVE. Mrs. Hood sits in arm-chair.*]

You've missed Marshall and Leonard.

MRS. HOOD

[*Gloomily sitting bolt upright.*] Is that so?

SYLVIA

You must have come by the lower road.

MRS. HOOD

I did.

[*There is a dead pause. SYLVIA feels there is something wrong, but hesitates about beginning anything unpleasant.*]

Well? What are we going to do?

SYLVIA

[*Brightening up.*] Anything. I have the whole morning before me. Let us have a game at something.

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

MRS. HOOD

Game! I don't play games.

SYLVIA

Well, we'll play some *indoor game*. I have heaps I play with Leonard.

MRS. HOOD

How can you stand there smiling and smirking?

SYLVIA

What do you want me to do? Frown?

MRS. HOOD

Don't tell me Leonard hasn't told you!

SYLVIA

Told me what?

MRS. HOOD

What he's done to Olive.

SYLVIA

[*Looks frightenedly at OLIVE, then at MRS. HOOD. Faintly:*] What *has* he done?

MRS. HOOD

Ruined her life.

OLIVE

Mother's quite wrong. He——

MRS. HOOD

[*Jumping in on her.*] Stop! [*To SYLVIA.*] I thought there was something wrong yesterday evening when she wouldn't eat her dinner—girls of her age don't refuse their food for nothing. This morning she had a headache—wasn't well enough to come down to breakfast. Then I knew something was the matter.

THE HARP OF LIFE

So I just wormed it out of her. Your son is the cause of her headache and heartache. A snake in the grass, that's what your son, Leonard, is.

OLIVE

[*Very distressed.*] Mother!

MRS. HOOD

Hold your tongue! [*To SYLVIA.*] A snake in the grass.

SYLVIA

Don't say that.

MRS. HOOD

What do *you* call it?

SYLVIA

[*Bewildered.*] Call *what*?

MRS. HOOD

Weren't they as good as engaged?

SYLVIA

I would hardly say that. We thought they might be.

MRS. HOOD

He's ruined her life—that's what he's done.

SYLVIA

I don't believe it.

OLIVE

It's not true.

MRS. HOOD

[*Glares at OLIVE, turns to SYLVIA.*] What else is it but ruin to a child with her nature when a young ne'er-do-well, after leading her—and everyone else—to think he was in love with her, suddenly turns round and tells

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

her he's *not*? That he won't marry her, and never meant to.

OLIVE

[*Rises and walks away.*] Oh!

MRS. HOOD

[*Nodding toward OLIVE.*] There! Did you see that? She wouldn't have *dared* get up and walk away while I was speaking yesterday afternoon. Now look at her! . . . Olive could marry the best.

SYLVIA

I'm sure she could. Please don't shout at me.

MRS. HOOD

Like a couple of fools, we set our hearts on *him*. I wish we'd never seen him—nor any of you.

OLIVE

Mother!

MRS. HOOD

Look at her! Her life is ruined—unless you step in.

SYLVIA

What can I do?

MRS. HOOD

Do? What *I* would if he were *my* son, and he'd ruined a girl.

SYLVIA

Why do you keep saying "*ruined*"?

OLIVE

Mother's quite wrong.

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MRS. HOOD

There, do you see that? Never a word of contradiction out of her lips until to-day. Can't you *see* she's been ruined? Thrown over by your precious son?

OLIVE

He *didn't* throw me over. We were never engaged. He never asked me to marry him.

MRS. HOOD

You see how she defends him? And her heart broken! Isn't *that* devotion?

SYLVIA

But she's right. There was no engagement.

MRS. HOOD

They were as good as engaged. Everyone knew that.

SYLVIA

Not through me. I've never mentioned it. I was waiting for Leonard to tell me. You make me miserable when you tell me that Olive has taken it so much to heart. But she would be infinitely unhappier if Leonard married her not loving her, just because we thought he should.

MRS. HOOD

Who wants him to love her? It's all stuff and nonsense the talk about *love*. So long as a girl is nice-looking and well-behaved and comes of respectable people what does it matter which girl a boy marries?

OLIVE

Oh! You don't know how ridiculous that sounds.

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

MRS. HOOD

Ridiculous! [*To SYLVIA.*] You see! Do you think she's ever called anything *I've* said ridiculous before? Never! . . . Your son has got to marry some time. They all do. Very well! Let him marry her.

OLIVE

Oh!

SYLVIA

That's impossible.

MRS. HOOD

Why is it?

SYLVIA

Because he's engaged to be married.

[*OLIVE turns round slowly and looks at SYLVIA.*]

MRS. HOOD

[*In blank astonishment.*] Engaged? Then what excuse has he got for treating Olive as he has?

OLIVE

[*Suddenly rising and facing her mother.*] He doesn't need any excuse. It will not make the slightest difference to me.

MRS. HOOD

Olive!

OLIVE

[*Goes straight over to her mother.*] You've made all kinds of cruel and absurd charges against Leonard—charges so ridiculous and unjust that you make me ashamed of being your daughter.

MRS. HOOD

Ashamed of *me*?

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OLIVE

Yes. Ashamed that I should have a mother who could show so little thought for another's feelings. Sylvia, Leonard has never made love to me, has never asked me to marry him. And the fact that he isn't going to is a matter of absolute indifference to me.

MRS. HOOD

Olive, how dare you?

OLIVE

Wait until I've finished. I've let you say what you've liked all my life without contradiction about things that didn't matter. They were not worth contradicting. But now that you've brought Leonard's honour into question I want to deny the truth of everything you've said about him. Sylvia, Leonard has always treated me generously, unselfishly, nobly. But for his kindness and understanding and pity I don't know how I should have lived through the last few years. And now to hear him abused and insulted when he is not here to defend himself, and about me, is unbearable. He is everything that is chivalrous and fine. And I'm glad that he's found someone worthy of his love. Because *I* don't love him. I *don't* love him. I don't love him.

[The strain has been too great. She buries her face in her hands and weeps on SYLVIA's shoulder.]

I don't want to marry him. I never wanted to marry him. I wouldn't marry him.

[SYLVIA puts her arms sympathetically round her.]

[MRS. HOOD rises, and is about to speak to OLIVE.]

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

SYLVIA

[*Quietly.*] I shouldn't say any more just now.

MRS. HOOD

We'll talk this over when I get you home, my girl.

OLIVE

[*Facing her mother defiantly.*] No, we will not. If you ever speak of Leonard again as you did just now, I'll go straight out of the house to any relative who'll take me in.

MRS. HOOD

[*Grimly.*] Oh, *will* you?

OLIVE

I will. I have my own life to live, wretched as it may be, and because you're my mother you have no right to make it one long torture. You've never tried to understand me. You've just asserted your authority over me as a mother until I hate the very word, "mother."

MRS. HOOD

Olive!

OLIVE

[*Weakly and despairingly.*] If I had anywhere else to go I wouldn't go back with you now. [*To SYLVIA.*] I'm so unhappy. So wretchedly unhappy.

[*She hides her head on SYLVIA's shoulder. The sound of a man whistling comes in through the open window. They all start—OLIVE in alarm, MRS. HOOD in anger. SYLVIA listens anxiously. OLIVE's teeth are chattering with fear.*]

THE HARP OF LIFE

Has he come back? Leonard? I couldn't bear to see him! I couldn't! I couldn't!

SYLVIA

[*Tries to quiet her.*] Ssh! Ssh! My dear Olive—it can't be Leonard.

[*Goes out through window onto porch and looks down the pathway. Comes back and speaks to OLIVE.*]

Mr. Saxon.

MRS. HOOD

[*In disgust.*] I couldn't bear to see *him* in my present state of mind. [*To OLIVE.*] As you have no other relatives to go to perhaps you'll come home with your mother.

[*SAXON appears on porch, and looks in through the window. He is in a well-worn country walking-suit, knee-breeches, gaiters, peaked cap, and carries a stout, knotted stick.*]

SAXON

[*Doffing his cap with a flourish.*] Well, well! This is a pleasant sight for an old man. Two roses. That's what ye are. A pale 'un an' a pink 'un. H'are ye this lovely mornin'? [*Shakes hands with SYLVIA.*] I needn't ask. No flower fairer [*shakes OLIVE's limp hand*] and little "Miss Forget-me-not"? How is your dear mother? Surely she hasn't let you out alone?

[*Mrs. Hood snorts.*]

[*Listens.*] That sounds strangely familiar. [*Slowly turns and sees MRS. HOOD.*] Ah! There she is. As

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

large as life. [*Goes to her with outstretched hands.*] Honest and ruddy with the joy of life and a clear conscience. [*Takes MRS. HOOD's unwilling hand.*] It does one's heart good to look at ye this wonderful day. [*Looks curiously at her with his keen twinkling eyes.*] Ye carry a benediction with ye. Always lookin' for good in everythin' and [*looks at OLIVE*] findin' it.

MRS. HOOD

[*Irritably.*] You can talk more nonsense——

SAXON

Flatterer! Nonsense is for youth. [*Languishingly.*] If I were only a year or two younger an' you a year or two *older*——

MRS. HOOD

Olive. [*Goes indignantly across the room to the door.*]

SAXON

Ye carry my heart with ye, dear lady.

MRS. HOOD

Come, Olive. [*Goes out without replying to or even looking at him.*]

SAXON

[*Winks at SYLVIA: then noticing the gravity of her face.*] Am I in the way?

SYLVIA

No. Just a minute, Godfrey.

SAXON

Right. [*Goes out on porch and lights a cigar.*]

THE HARP OF LIFE

SYLVIA

[*Her arm around OLIVE.*] It was splendid of you to defend Leonard.

OLIVE

But Sylvia, I don't love him—really I don't love him. [*In distress.*] Oh, you mustn't think——

SYLVIA

I don't *think*. I *know* you love him, and I'm bitterly disappointed that you're not going to be his wife. You have character, Olive. But don't lose your sweetness. And you mustn't be too hard on your mother.

OLIVE

[*Struggling to control herself.*] Please—don't! I—can't—trust—myself—to—to—— [SYLVIA *impulsively takes OLIVE in her arms and kisses her.*]

MRS. HOOD

[*Calls outside.*] Olive!

[SYLVIA and OLIVE go out together.]

[SAXON looks in, sees that the room is empty, comes in from the porch, his hands plunged deep in the cross-pockets of his breeches, his brows knit, his whole attitude one of dejection.

[SYLVIA returns, closes the door, stands thinking a moment, troubled: then turns to SAXON.]

SAXON

[*Watching her keenly.*] The child had been cryin'?

SYLVIA

Yes.

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

SAXON

Poor kid. Tears sting at her age. They have more salt in 'em. At *mine* the ducts are dry. . . . Youth thinks life so serious. They've no idea how amusin' it really is. [*Chuckles mirthlessly.*] Poor kid. I'll wager that mother's at the bottom of it. Makes ye want to weep to even look at her. But to *live* with—— [*Shivers violently.*] Bit upset yerself, ain't ye?

SYLVIA

[*Rousing herself: trying to smile.*] I'm all right.

SAXON

Rather I went?

SYLVIA

No, no.

SAXON

Marshall's gone, o' course?

SYLVIA

Yes. And Leonard.

SAXON

[*Astonished.*] Oh! Was *he* here this mornin'?

SYLVIA

Yes. Of course.

SAXON

But he didn't come home last night? Did he?

SYLVIA

No.

SAXON

[*Sinks into a chair, chuckling.*] I'd ha' won me wager.

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SYLVIA

You would.

SAXON

Did he enjoy the theatre? . . . He went to the theatre.

SYLVIA

I know.

SAXON

Yes. He went. I was there, too. They sat just above me in a box.

SYLVIA

[*Unconcerned.*] Did they?

SAXON

[*Nods meaningly.*] Just above me. Very nice they looked together, too. Delightful. The young dog. It gave me quite a pang. Didn't you tell me it was to be a "stag" party Leonard was going to? Just *men*? Or did I dream it?

SYLVIA

[*On her guard: she is suspicious of his manner.*] I daresay he had dinner with them.

SAXON

Oh, no, he didn't. He was at the next table to mine at dinner. [*She looks at him, dreading what he may tell her.*] He was. Really. With the same companion. I heard him tell the head-waiter to get him a box. So I thought I'd trot along too. Pretty little opera. An' a pretty little pair they made. . . . Well? Ye don't seem surprised?

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

SYLVIA

Why should I be?

SAXON

Exactly. Why should ye be? They all do it. . . .
Tho' I must admit I didn't think Leonard—somehow—
so soon. . . . And with such a remarkable person. . . .
Struck me as odd. . . . No?

SYLVIA

There was nothing odd about it. Leonard told me.

SAXON

[*Very astonished.*] *Told ye?* Well, what d'ye make
o' that! . . . *Told ye, did he?* *That's* a new one. When
I was a lad we didn't tell our mothers those sort o'
things. *That* we didn't.

SYLVIA

[*With growing alarm.*] What things?

SAXON

Oh! Dinner *en tête-a-tête* and a quiet little box at a
theatre with a—delightful companion.

SYLVIA

Why shouldn't Leonard tell me he went to a theatre
with his fiancée?

SAXON

[*Springs up and looks at her in blank amazement:
then he growls ominously.*] His *what?* Fiancée? . . .
Did he tell ye *that?*

SYLVIA

He did.

SAXON

And you believed it?

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SYLVIA

Why shouldn't I believe it?

SAXON

Pah! Men don't marry *that* kind of woman.

SYLVIA

[*With fear at her heart.*] *What* kind of woman?

SAXON

[*Laughs harshly.*] Fiancée! Zeila Vorona! Ha! Wouldn't she like the chance? . . . So he told ye *that*, did he?

SYLVIA

Do you know Mrs. Vorona?

SAXON

Know Zeila? Everyone knows her—in that set.

SYLVIA

What set?

SAXON

The one Leonard is evidently movin' in. . . . Leonard and Zeila! Fiancée! [*Sits and lolls back smiling malignantly and muttering inaudibly.*]

SYLVIA

[*Leans forward looking at him very intently: her voice trembles.*] *Who* is Mrs. Verona?

SAXON

A very beautiful, extremely cultured—*demi-mondaine*.

SYLVIA

[*Starts back as tho' she had been struck: her hands press her cheeks: she gives a faint cry.*] Oh-h!

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SAXON

An' he told ye he was engaged to her?

SYLVIA

[*Faintly.*] Yes.

SAXON

[*Starts bolt upright as a new thought comes to him.*]

There may be something in it! [*The idea becomes clearer.*] She may have landed him. [*Jumps up.*] Then the fat *would* sizzle on the gridiron. [*Practically convinced that his supposition is true.*] That alters things.

SYLVIA

What does it alter?

SAXON

I don't like talkin' about it to you. . . . I really came to see your husband—or Leonard.

SYLVIA

They're not here. I am. Tell me.

SAXON

[*Shivers.*] Booh! It's a nasty thing to stir up.

SYLVIA

Never mind that. I am his mother.

SAXON

That's what makes it so particularly obnoxious.

SYLVIA

[*Insistently.*] Tell me.

SAXON

All right, Sylvia, old friend. Ye've got to know some time'. Here goes. The lady who went to the theatre

THE HARP OF LIFE

last night with your boy and whom you describe as his fiancée is, at the moment, living under the protection of my son, an' I'm payin' the bills.

[SYLVIA *shrivels down into the chair: her hand goes to her mouth to stifle an ejaculation of horror.*]

That's why I had the impertinent curiosity to follow 'em to the theatre. . . . It's also the reason why I tramped over here this mornin' hopin' to find Marshall in. . . . It looked at the first "take-off" like a case of innocent poachin'. *That* might be nipped in time. No harm done. But if he wants to *marry* the lady! . . . That's quite another pair o' shoes. . . . An' a pretty dam bad fit. *Someone's* goin' to get hurt.

[SYLVIA *beats one hand helplessly against the other. She tries to speak but no articulate sound comes.*]

It'll be a knock-out for Ormonde. Square on the jaw. . . . Fancy Zeila thinkin' of marryin' again! And a boy!

SYLVIA

[*Staring into space.*] She's *that* kind of woman!

SAXON

[*Nods.*] She is. There must *be* that kind in this highly civilized era we're livin' in. . . . They're a necessary part o' the wheel. No use blinkin' at it. *There they are.* . . . Fancy *Leonard* meetin' her! That's what knocks me. . . . He must ha' made some choice pals. . . . Little world: little city: little life—the gay one. . . . They move round in a mouse-trap. . . . All blackguards meet sometime, somewhere. . . . Poor little *Leonard*.

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

SYLVIA

He shall not marry *that kind*.

SAXON

It 'ud be a shame. . . . All the world to choose from an' he picks Zeila! Takes me back to *my* salad-days—and Pinkie. [*Shudders.*]

SYLVIA

Leonard said she'd been married.

SAXON

Oh, yes. She was. For a while. Years ago. . . . I saw Vorona at supper afterwards, dancin' between mouthfuls. . . . Delightful fellow. . . . Worshipped her. . . . Poor little beast.

SYLVIA

Did she divorce him? [*Waits: fearing the answer.*]

SAXON

[*Slowly.*] No. . . . He divorced her. . . . An' I paid the costs and damages.

SYLVIA

Your *son*?

SAXON

Yes. . . . Ormonde's buyin' experience an' I'm payin' for it. . . . Tough on Vorona, too. He'd pulled her up out o' the trough.

SYLVIA

There were *others*?

SAXON

Others? . . . A string of 'em.

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SYLVIA

Oh, it's filthy! Filthy! Filthy! To think of Leonard being mixed up with them.

SAXON

I wouldn't blame him just yet. I'll lay a hundred he doesn't know much about her.

SYLVIA

[*Eagerly.*] I'm sure of that. He defended her to me. Praised her. [*Remembering.*] Yet he told me of her divorce.

SAXON

All of it?

SYLVIA

No. Just that she was divorced and had suffered.

SAXON

I know. . . . Some women have a way of tellin' things—makes 'em seem white as snow. Especially if the youngster doesn't know much. From our discussion yesterday, I gathered Leonard's in that class.

SYLVIA

He knows nothing! Nothing! Marshall wouldn't tell him! He wouldn't tell him!

SAXON

There ye are. First time he's foot-loose up on the rocks he goes.

SYLVIA

Time and time again I begged my husband to warn him. I wanted Leonard to go into the world knowing

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

how to fight it. The *world!* The filthy little world my boy's been caught in. The world of pleasure! And what kind of pleasure? Their one aim—degradation. I wanted him to know how that pleasure is paid for! The toll paid in disease, enfeebled intellects—and what follows. A race of wistful, unhealthy, young-old children. They are the spawn pleasure gives to life. . . . It was his duty to warn him. . . . I wish *I'd* done it. . . . All parents should. . . . They have no right to shelter themselves behind a veneer of mock-modesty as Marshall has. . . . He shall not marry her. . . . He *can't* marry her. [*Goes on talking vehemently to herself.*]

SAXON

It 'ud be a pity. That kind o' tie-up seldom turns out a winner. . . . I've seen some rub along a year or two. That's about the limit. Then one of 'em snaps it like a bit o' tape. . . . [*Muses.*] That kind o' woman can't stick. Reformed mistresses don't always make the best wives. Still Zeila's—a pretty good sort. Been straight as a string with Ormonde—so far as we know—till this thing came along. . . . She's a bit frightened o' Ormonde. He doesn't let anyone play the fool. He'll quarrel from the drop o' the hat. Got a lot of his old dad in him—as well as Pinkie. . . . I flung her out when I found her takin' the bit in her teeth. . . . So would Ormonde. They had a tiff a while ago so he's off to Norway to cool down. . . . They've had 'em before and always come together again. This looks more serious. She must have meant it this time. . . . When I saw her

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come into the dinin'-room last night with Leonard d'ye know I was rattled for a minute. Really rattled.

SYLVIA

Did Leonard see you?

SAXON

[*Laughs gratingly.*] Yes, poor lad. I spared his blushes by readin' a paper when I wasn't eatin'. . . . When the opera was over I walked out behind 'em. Pure accident. . . . They got into her car—*Ormonde's* car—*my* car—and the order was "home". . . . I brooded it out into the wee sma' hours an' made up my mind I'd sit into the game. . . . Ormonde has a villainous temper. Stops at nothin' after a few drinks. . . . Loves to smash things—and people. We'd all land in a police-court if he caught 'em. . . . Nasty business.

SYLVIA

He shall not marry her. He shall not. No.

SAXON

Why not send him away? Better still—*take* him? . . . Ha! I wanted Marshall to let him go with Ormonde to Norway. Wouldn't hear of it. . . . Seemed to think Ormonde 'ud corrupt him. . . . Ha! Corrupt him! Mr. Leonard's certainly fooled us all. . . . Take him away. That's best. . . . When Ormonde gets back an' they've made it up, Leonard won't get a chance to see her. Ormonde's as jealous as a prize-pup. . . . Shouldn't wonder if he married her himself some time. . . . That's the ticket. Pack him off.

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ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

SYLVIA

No. It's got to be broken. Broken completely. . . .
He must know her as she *is*.

SAXON

That's good, too. . . . Strip her to the bone. Make
him cut and run.

SYLVIA

[*Suddenly remembering.*] His father's going there
to-day.

SAXON

[*Astonished.*] Where?

SYLVIA

To call on her. . . . He'll do the one thing to drive
them into each other's arms. . . . I must see her first.
Take me to her. Now. [*Excitedly.*]

SAXON

Ye're right. . . . Marshall's hot-headed—an' she's
very tenacious. An' a good fighter.

SYLVIA

She may listen to me.

SAXON

Anyone would.

SYLVIA

I'll get my hat. [*Hurries out.*]

SAXON

I'll look out a train. [*Taking out time-table and studying it.*]

[*SYLVIA comes back quickly with hat and gloves. She*

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is now at great tension. Tears are welling up in her eyes.]

SAXON

There's one at 12.15. Plenty of time.

[As he looks at her for the first time he grasps something of what she is suffering: he speaks to her gently and pityingly.]

I'm sorry to have come on such an errand, Sylvia.
To you.

SYLVIA

[Wistfully.] We were too happy. . . . Something had to happen.

SAXON

You'll get him back.

SYLVIA

[Her voice breaking.] If I—don't?

SAXON

That's unthinkable.

SYLVIA

Oh, Godfrey, Godfrey, what a world you men make of it!

SAXON

Don't we? . . . Woman helps a bit, tho'.

SYLVIA

If only Marshall had told him!

SAXON

[Nods.] Best time to do it is when you give 'em their first latch-key. It opens more than the front door. . . . Innocence puts a ridiculous value on the charm of vice. . . . It's all so new: so glitter-y: so dam nice-an'-easy.

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

. . . If they knew what was waitin' for 'em there mightn't be so many converts to the broad road.

SYLVIA

Why didn't you teach *your* son that?

SAXON

I did. But there's too much of me in him. They didn't have to *drag* him in. He *jumped*.

SYLVIA

Leonard has too much of *me* to be—dragged in.

SAXON

I'm sure of it. . . . Still he's done pretty well—for a beginner. Picked the queen o' the lot. . . . Too nice a lad to join that ghastly procession. . . . Look back ten years on the pleasure-seekers of a big city, an' what d'ye see? Blasted reputations: careers halted midway: hard-faced elderly men an' thin-haired, blotchy, battered young 'uns. Not a sensation left. No joy in the present an' no hope for the future. . . . So they go where the lights glare an' the bands shriek an' everybody shouts so loud they can't have time to think. . . . I sit in my little corner an' watch 'em. . . . The Blackguards Progress.

SYLVIA

Take me to her.

SAXON

Right. [*Picks up his hat and knotted-stick.*]

SYLVIA

Will she give him up?

THE HARP OF LIFE

SAXON

I think not. . . . If she's really gone on Leonard she'll fight for him. . . . She'll fight all right—if she loves him.

SYLVIA

I love him. I'll fight for him. . . . Take me to her.

SAXON

Hadn't I better phone? It 'ud save a journey for nothin' if she's not in. Shall I?

SYLVIA

[*Distractedly.*] Yes, but hurry. I want to be moving. Doing something.

[*She watches him go to the telephone and take off the receiver, her face drawn, her breathing rapid.*]

SAXON

[*Speaking into the receiver.*] Hello! Hello! Are you there? Ah! Give me 721 Cory, will ye? Yes, 721. Thank ye very much. [*Hums softly as he waits.*] Hello! Eh? You 721 Cory? . . . You *are*? . . . Is Mrs. Vorona in? . . . *Is* she? Oh. Will you be so good as to tell her Mr. Saxon 'ud like to speak to her? If it's not troublin' her too much. . . . *Saxon.* . . . The *old* 'un. Yes. . . . *No.* His *father!* *That's* it. I'll hold on. [*Looks up at SYLVIA and nods.*] She's in. [*Looks at his watch.*] What time is it? I'm stopped. [*SYLVIA shows him her wrist watch.*] We're all right. Ah! [*Into receiver.*] Hello! Is that Zeila? That *you*? How are ye? . . . Yes it's *me*—Godfrey. . . . The ol' mountebank! [*Laughs.*] Never better. . . . You sound

ACT II: ADOLESCENCE

splendid. But ye always *are*, aren't ye? . . . Eh? . . . In the country, walkin' about. . . Yes. . . I'm goin' in by the 12.15 an' I thought o' runnin' in on ye. What d'ye say? . . . Now that's very sweet an' dear of you. [SYLVIA takes the receiver from him and listens to the voice from the other end, at the same time motioning him to go on talking into the telephone.] What are you doin' this fine day?

[SYLVIA listens to the reply then hands the receiver back to him. She goes to the table and takes up the album of her son's photographs and looks at them. She closes the album and goes over and looks up at the painting of him hanging on the wall. SAXON meanwhile has resumed talking into the receiver.]

I didn't hear a word ye said. Someone must ha' cut in. . . . What? . . . I see. . . . Eh? Oh just for the æsthetic pleasure o' lookin' at ye an' listenin' to ye. . . . All right. . . . I'll ha' lunch in town an' look in about three. . . . Thank ye. Very sweet an' charmin' o' ye. But ye're always sweet an' charmin', ain't ye? . . . Good-bye. Much obliged. . . . Good-bye! [*Hangs up the receiver. Takes a long breath: looks at SYLVIA: rises and goes to her. She is still looking at LEONARD's picture as a little boy. He puts his hands on her shoulders and turns her around: there are tears in her eyes. She chokes back a sob.*] No tears, Sylvia. She hates 'em.

SYLVIA

[*Shakes her head.*] No. No tears.

THE HARP OF LIFE

SAXON

Of course not. [*Takes the handkerchief from her hand and tenderly wipes her eyes.*]

SYLVIA

[*Brokenly, pointing to the picture.*] I can't realize he's a man. I can only see my little boy with his long yellow curls.

SAXON

[*Hands back the handkerchief.*] Remember, Sylvia. No tears.

SYLVIA

[*Crying bitterly.*] No, Godfrey. No—tears.

[*They start to go out.*]

It isn't all—fun—being—a—mother, Godfrey, is it?

[*As they disappear the curtain falls.*]

[*End of Act 2.*]

ACT III: MANHOOD

The drawing-room of MRS. VORONA's residence. A spacious, handsome room decorated in white and gold. A large, purple flower-bowl hangs prominently from the ceiling. An imposing purple screen is noticeable near a grand-piano on which is a purple photo-frame with LEONARD's photograph looking out from it.

There are two doors. One at back connecting with the landing, the second to right leading to MRS. VORONA's boudoir.

The room is on the first-floor and with the open windows can be seen the trees fronting the house.

The door to right is slightly open. From within comes the delightful sound of a harp on which is being played, quite exquisitely, "ADORABLE TOURMENTS".

After a few seconds the door at back opens and GODFREY SAXON peeps in. Seeing that no one is in the room he comes in quietly, closes the door and listens to the music. He smiles grimly and goes to the piano, thinking, his brows knit perplexedly. He halts at the sight of the purple frame with LEONARD's photograph beaming at him. He takes it in his hand and looks at it, replaces it, meditates, apparently decides on his course

THE HARP OF LIFE

of action, goes over to the door leading to the boudoir and taps several times, between the bars of the music.

MRS. VORONA

[*Calling cheerfully from inside the room.*] Come in.
[*The playing on the harp continues.*]

SAXON

[*Speaking during a bar's rest in the music.*] May I?

MRS. VORONA

[*Laughing.*] Oh! It's you. Wait there.

[*The music stops.*]

[*SAXON walks around the room humming the refrain of "Adorable Tourments."*]

[*MRS. VORONA comes in from her boudoir. She is an extremely handsome, distinguished-looking woman of perhaps twenty-four, though the exigencies of a somewhat chequered career have given her the manner and bearing of one in the early thirties. She is in buoyant high spirits.*]

MRS. VORONA

Hello, little man.

[*Goes straight to him and holds out her hand.*]

SAXON

[*Striking an exaggerated attitude of admiration, ejaculates.*] Superb!

MRS. VORONA

Like it?

[*Moving so that he can admire the dress from all angles.*]

ACT III: MANHOOD

SAXON

Like it! Oh! [Presses his heart as though in ecstasy and kisses the tips of his fingers with a flourish.]
The last word!

MRS. VORONA

I'm glad. You paid for it.

SAXON

Whatever the cost it was too little. [*Raises her hand towards his lips and kisses the air an inch from her fingers.*] You do yer *modiste* credit. She's worthy of a big order. I give ye *carte blanche*. I feel generous this marvellous day.

MRS. VORONA

[*Shakes her head laughingly.*] No, Godfrey. No more. When you pay the bill for *this* you may write "*finis*" after it. . . . I'm not going to stick you any longer. . . . Sit down and rest your little self. Smoke if you like.

[*Takes a cigarette and lights it.*]

SAXON

[*Sits nervously.*] Dear of ye to let me call.

[*Watches her anxiously.*]

MRS. VORONA

Not a bit. I was going to send for you if you hadn't.

SAXON

Were ye?

MRS. VORONA

[*Laughs.*] Yes. But I thought you'd be round.

THE HARP OF LIFE

SAXON

[*Uncomfortably.*] Did ye really?

MRS. VORONA

Rather. . . . When I saw you last night hiding behind a newspaper and a pile of dishes I knew you'd be sitting in this room within twenty-four hours. And there you are.

SAXON

[*Feebly.*] Yes. Here I am.

MRS. VORONA

You *did* look funny pretending not to see me.
[*Laughs.*]

SAXON

[*Laughing too, though without mirth.*] I suppose I must have.

MRS. VORONA

Why didn't you join us?

SAXON

Oh, I don't know. Ye were enjoyin' yer food without me.

MRS. VORONA

And you could have come into our box instead of sitting just beneath.

SAXON

[*Quite uncomfortable.*] What an ass I was not to think of it.

MRS. VORONA

And I'd have dropped you home if you'd come in the motor.

ACT III: MANHOOD

SAXON

[*With a sickly smile.*] What a lot I missed.

MRS. VORONA

[*Looking at him whimsically.*] Godfrey! You're a foxy little man, but you're a *shocking* detective.

SAXON

Don't kick me when ye've got me down.

[*Laughing feebly.*]

MRS. VORONA

Come straight over and speak next time. Don't *spy*. I don't like it. [*Sharply.*] See?

SAXON

[*Faintly.*] All right, Zeila.

[*Goes across, aimlessly apparently, to the piano and stands looking at LEONARD'S photograph.*]

MRS. VORONA

[*Loudly.*] Well?

SAXON

[*Starts; picks up the photo-frame.*] Nice little kid.

MRS. VORONA

[*Insolently.*] Isn't he?

SAXON

Ormonde's mug used to be in this.

[*Holding up the photo-frame.*]

MRS. VORONA

It isn't going to be any more.

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SAXON

[*Replacing the frame on the piano.*] Ain't it?

MRS. VORONA

[*Shakes her head.*] No.

SAXON

Chucked him in the discard?

MRS. VORONA

Yes. And about time, too.

SAXON

Oh, I don't know.

MRS. VORONA

[*Sneeringly.*] I shouldn't think you'd mind.

SAXON

I don't know about that, either. . . . Take the rough with the smooth, I think ye've had a pretty good influence on him.

MRS. VORONA

[*In derision.*] Good influence! On *him*!

SAXON

Ye had, Zeila. We're mostly what women make us. Ain't we?

MRS. VORONA

I'd take precious little pride in the making of Ormonde.

SAXON

Yet ye had *some*—once.

MRS. VORONA

He soon changed that.

ACT III: MANHOOD

SAXON

Ye've quarreled. . . . Ain't ye?

MRS. VORONA

No more than usual.

SAXON

Hasn't he treated ye right?

MRS. VORONA

He's paid my bills—with your money. That's about as right as he could treat anyone. [*Suddenly she cries out vehemently.*] Drop him. I have.

SAXON

[*Sitting beside her.*] What's the sudden "right-about" mean, Zeila?

MRS. VORONA

I'm sick of him. And *this*. . . .

SAXON

[*He is now quite dejected.*] That so?

MRS. VORONA

It is. . . . Don't look so worried.

SAXON

I can't help it. I *am* worried . . . I'm pretty fond o' Ormonde in me rough, dam-silly way. . . . Suppose I oughtn't to be—but I *am*. I hate to see ye take the bit in yer pretty little teeth an' ride rough-shod over him. It ain't friendly.

MRS. VORONA

He'll find someone else.

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SAXON

I see *you* have.

MRS. VORONA

I have.

SAXON

How long do ye think it'll last?

MRS. VORONA

Just so long as I can hold him. . . . Now I'm going to give you a really good laugh. . . . Godfrey, for the *first* time I find myself *loved*—and for the *last* time I'm *in love*! . . . Well? Why don't you laugh? . . . Isn't it screamingly funny that *I* should find anyone—*now*—to love me? Isn't it still more amusing that *I* should catch it? . . . Go on. Croak out the disagreeable, unbelieving, sneering little noise you make for a laugh.

SAXON

I don' feel like it, Zeila. . . . I'm thinkin'——

MRS. VORONA

What?

SAXON

—that it does ye a great deal of credit.

MRS. VORONA

I *knew* you'd sneer.

SAXON

I mean it. . . . Sort o' reincarnation. . . . A romance in *purple*. . . . Ain't he rather young?

MRS. VORONA

Well? I'm not *old*.

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ACT III: MANHOOD

SAXON

No. Of course ye ain't. . . . Nice kid. Nice an' *innocent*.

MRS. VORONA

He didn't have *you* to show him around. Or Ormonde.

SAXON

He's got *you* now.

MRS. VORONA

[*Angrily.*] Stop that.

SAXON

[*Humbly.*] Beg yer pardon. . . . Have ye weighed it well?

MRS. VORONA

Don't talk about love as though it were butter. . . . *Weighed* it! . . . I'm leaving here to-morrow.

SAXON

[*Aghast.*] *Are* ye?

MRS. VORONA

I've taken a flat *and* a chaperone. . . . I'll leave the keys of the house with the agents. Everything else with your lawyer—or *you*. I don't care which.

SAXON

Goin' to walk out o' this nice place?

MRS. VORONA

I am.

SAXON

[*Looking around.*] Leave all the pretty things? Purple—an' everything?

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THE HARP OF LIFE

MRS. VORONA

Yes.

SAXON

Leave poor old Ormonde, too?

MRS. VORONA

I've *done* that.

SAXON

[*Seriously.*] It won't be so easy, Zeila. He cares for ye—cares for ye a whole lot. He stops at nothin' when he's crossed. I can't control him. We don't want our names in the "noos"-sheets, do we?

MRS. VORONA

I want *mine*. And I'm going to have it. Among the "marriages."

SAXON

[*Coaxingly.*] Zeila, old girl, don't burn everythin' up. Take a day or two. Set your little brain a-workin'. . . . Send Mr. Leonard back to his paint-brush, an' his family. . . . [*Waits: she says nothing.*] By an' bye—who knows?—Ormonde'll feel the cravin' to settle down an' have a real home of his own. An' there ye are. . . . I'll give ye a beauty. Better'n this. . . . An' a country-place, too. Horses an' dogs an' poultry an' cows. I'll watch ye milk 'em. [*Watches her plaintively as he makes his poor, little weak joke.*] Don' give Ormonde the "go-by," Zeila.

MRS. VORONA

Do you really mean you'd like Ormonde to marry me?

ACT III: MANHOOD

SAXON

I do. Ye know how to manage him. Get a firm hand on the bearin'-rein. . . . An' ye've got the same tastes an' the same friends. What if ye *have* made a slip or two? So's he. Make a sight better match for ye than the kid.

MRS. VORONA

[*Very quietly.*] You're an awfully decent sort, Godfrey.

SAXON

No, I ain't. Hard as nails, really. . . . All this is pure selfishness. I *would* like to see Ormonde properly fixed before I take the long count.

MRS. VORONA

[*Shaking her head.*] Too late. . . . It's the truth, Godfrey. I *am* in love. Just like a girl. And it's wonderful! I tell you it's wonderful to wake thinking of someone and to know he's thinking of me. . . . To look forward to his coming instead of dreading it. . . . That's the way it was with Ormonde. . . . Leonard and I are going to start fair.

SAXON

Can ye?

MRS. VORONA

[*Angrily.*] Yes, we can.

SAXON

[*Quieting her.*] All right. . . . Will ye give me one little mite o' consolation? . . . If anythin' trips up will ye give Ormonde another show? . . . Will ye? . . .

THE HARP OF LIFE

It ain't much to ask. An' it 'ud give me a sort o' sportin' chance.

MRS. VORONA

There's no chance.

SAXON

I like the "outsiders." Ye always get a good price against 'em. . . . Won't ye? . . . No? . . . All right, Zeila. [*Bending suddenly over her; entire change of tone.*] What about the lad's people?

MRS. VORONA

He hasn't told them yet.

SAXON

Yes, he has. This mornin'. I just remembered. His mother'll be here presently.

MRS. VORONA

Will she?

SAXON

She's almost due. I came on ahead to pave the way. [*Ruefully.*] Fine bit o' pavin' I've done, haven't I?

MRS. VORONA

[*With rising suspicion and anger.*] Did you bring her here?

SAXON

In a sort o' way.

MRS. VORONA

That's like you! [*Looking at him, contemptuously.*] Have you *told* her about me?

SAXON

A bit.

ACT III: MANHOOD

MRS. VORONA

[*Derisively.*] Your "*bit*"! She knows *everything*, then?

SAXON

I don't pretend to know *that*, Zeila.

MRS. VORONA

[*Furiously.*] Oh! What a dirty thing to do! To bring her here. *Here!* . . . What sort of person is she?

SAXON

Hasn't Leonard told ye?

MRS. VORONA

No. What is she like?

SAXON

She's a very *good* woman, Zeila.

MRS. VORONA

She *must* be to have such a son. Prim and proper, I suppose?

SAXON

Well, o' course . . .

MRS. VORONA

Goes to church, dresses in black, wears hideous hats, and cries and prays on the slightest provocation, eh?

SAXON

[*Quietly, with malicious delight.*] It might be a portrait.

MRS. VORONA

That kind will have no use for me.

THE HARP OF LIFE

SAXON

She's wrapped up in Leonard.

MRS. VORONA

Then I've got to unwrap her.

SAXON

Don't be hard on her. . . . We're old friends. . . . It's for her sake I'm here. . . . I'm sorry if I've said anything to upset ye. . . . But, ye see, when I heard about Leonard I just "saw red" and let out the box-o'-tricks. Sorry, Zeila.

MRS. VORONA

[*Trying to compose her thoughts.*] Oh, keep quiet.

SAXON

I've lived too long: that's what's the matter with me. [*Walking to window and looking out.*] Dam good riddance when I drop out. What a mucky thing the whole game is. [*Suddenly.*] Here she is! Gettin' out o' the taxi now! Let me bring her up . . . better than the servants.

MRS. VORONA

All right.

SAXON

Don't be rough on her, old girl. She's—she's salt o' the earth. [*Hurries out. MRS. VORONA stands thinking a moment, then goes over to piano, takes up mirror and looks at herself. Then goes quickly into room. In a few seconds SYLVIA enters with SAXON.*] Shall I wait for you?

SYLVIA

No.

ACT III: MANHOOD

SAXON

Good luck, Sylvia.

[*Watches her into the room; goes out, closing the door.*]

[*SYLVIA looks around the room. The general colour scheme arrests her attention first; then, as she realizes where LEONARD found the inspiration, she looks at the bowl and the screen, and lastly at the frame containing his photograph on the piano.*]

[*MRS. VORONA comes in. She has taken advantage of the few moments to add some trifling adornments. She looks at SYLVIA in absolute amazement, deprived of speech by the contrast between the woman before her and the woman she had expected. SYLVIA turns and looks searchingly at her. She, too, is surprised at the appearance of MRS. VORONA.*]

MRS. VORONA

Are you Mrs. Brooke? [*Incredulously.*]

SYLVIA

Yes.

MRS. VORONA

Leonard's mother?

SYLVIA

Yes.

MRS. VORONA

But you're so *young*!

SYLVIA

So is he.

MRS. VORONA

He doesn't think so. He rather fancies *twenty-three* is quite old.

THE HARP OF LIFE

SYLVIA

Did he tell you he was twenty-three?

MRS. VORONA

Yes.

SYLVIA

He's nineteen!

MRS. VORONA

Nineteen?

SYLVIA

month ago.

MRS. VORONA

Fancy that! Nineteen! [*Laughs.*] I thought he was rather backward for twenty-three. Nineteen! Rather early to think of marriage, isn't it?

[*She has grown suddenly nervous in the presence of SYLVIA, whose steady look and self-possession rather unnerves her.*]

SYLVIA

It is!

MRS. VORONA

Still he's asked me to marry him.

SYLVIA

He told me.

MRS. VORONA

And I've promised him that I will.

SYLVIA

He told me that, too.

MRS. VORONA

And you, naturally, wanted to see the woman he is going to marry.

ACT III: MANHOOD

SYLVIA

Yes.

MRS. VORONA

Well. Here I am. Look at me.

SYLVIA

I am looking at you.

MRS. VORONA

Do you approve Leonard's choice?

SYLVIA

No.

MRS. VORONA

That's a pity. . . . What are you going to do about it?

SYLVIA

Prevent it, if I can.

MRS. VORONA

How?

SYLVIA

I don't quite know.

MRS. VORONA

Try.

SYLVIA

I'm going to try.

MRS. VORONA

All right. I'll listen. . . . Begin. . . . Give all the reasons against marriage mothers have ever given when their sons have wanted to do exactly what their fathers did before them.

SYLVIA

I don't want to talk to you as a *mother* . . . I want to speak to you as a *woman*.

THE HARP OF LIFE

MRS. VORONA

You can't. . . . We don't speak the same language.

SYLVIA

We should. We both love the same boy. And between my love and yours—if you really love him—there can't be such a great difference.

MRS. VORONA

Isn't there? . . . That's where you're wrong.

SYLVIA

Why am I wrong?

MRS. VORONA

Because *I* love his youth, his enthusiasm, his idealism.

SYLVIA

So do I. . . . Only I want him to preserve them.

MRS. VORONA

And you don't think he will—with me?

SYLVIA

No. . . . Do you?

MRS. VORONA

Yes, I do.

SYLVIA

Do you? . . . Honestly?

MRS. VORONA

Yes. I've some idealism left; he's restored my drooping enthusiasm: and I've still my youth. . . . [*Pleadingly.*] Mrs. Brooke, Leonard has opened out a new life to me. And what has made it all the more wonderful is that it came at a time when the old one

ACT III: MANHOOD

had grown unbearable. Its meanness and tawdriness and bitterness were destroying me.

SYLVIA

I see. You want to use my boy to nourish your soul. I would *give* mine to feed *his*. If there's no deeper note in your love than grasping at what he brings you then in such a marriage my son would indeed be lost.

MRS. VORONA

Lost? Why?

SYLVIA

Because if you take—take—always *take* and never *give*, you miss the one real note of love. You would rob Leonard of everything you say you love in him. . . . And when you'd tired of him he'd come back to me with the qualities we both value in him now—gone. And it would benefit no one. Least of all—*you*.

MRS. VORONA

That's not true. . . . I knew we couldn't think or talk alike. . . . What can you know of me? . . . Just what Godfrey Saxon told you. . . . Godfrey Saxon! . . . I tell you *I* can look at the stars as well as Leonard, though my feet *may* have been chained to the earth. . . . Don't think I like *this*. . . . I don't. . . . I hate it. . . . I despise it. . . . And he'll take me out of it. . . .

SYLVIA

Can he?

MRS. VORONA

Why not? I love *beauty* as well as he. We'll seek it. . . . Seek it together. . . . I've planned it all. . . .

THE HARP OF LIFE

The places I saw for the first time when I was a girl of eighteen. . . . He'll give them a value they didn't have *then*. . . . His love will do that. . . . It's all *here*—here in my brain. . . . It will be wonderful.

SYLVIA

How long would it last?

MRS. VORONA

Why shouldn't it last? . . . Oh, it will last. . . . Have no fear. . . . I haven't. . . . We'll live for each other.

SYLVIA

You would be running away from yourself—your *other* self. . . . One day it would overtake you.

MRS. VORONA

If it did I'd crush it. . . . Crush it. . . . As I have *now*. . . . I've done with that. Done with it. No more. . . . Never. . . . No sitting in garish restaurants, with their raucous din; hung with jewels as a prize-animal is with ribbons, and facing me the sensual beast who bought them—and *me*. . . . Ah! No more of that. . . . Done with! . . . Finished. . . . I'll dream all my old dreams in the warmth and colour of the East. And I'll have a young, eager, hungry heart beside me, seeing beauty for the first time. . . . Our days will be spent *searching* for beauty. . . . And night will come as a blessing—not a curse. . . . Night! The hideous time between dark and dawn where such as I have been paying the debt for our glimpses of beauty by day. . . . His love and faith will renew my youth and

ACT III: MANHOOD

give me back something of all I've lost. . . . Something!

SYLVIA

Oh, my dear, my dear!

MRS. VORONA

You can't understand that.

SYLVIA

I do understand it. I do. And—I pity you. . . . I pity you—because it's so impossible. . . . So completely impossible.

MRS. VORONA

Do you think you can prevent it?

SYLVIA

You are going to.

MRS. VORONA

I am? Indeed I am not. . . . He loves me. See how strong your motherhood is against *that*.

SYLVIA

I know. . . . Mother, father, honour, career—nothing matters compared to the blinding happiness a *stranger* can bring him. . . . Oh! it has always seemed that God has denied permanency to any earthly tie so that we may be content to go to *Him* at the end. . . . Our passions wither. Our ambitions fade. . . . Only *love* can endure because it is infinite. . . . It takes us to *Him*.

MRS. VORONA

I thought you were that kind. . . . The kind that believes in *Him*.

THE HARP OF LIFE

SYLVIA

Don't *you*?

MRS. VORONA

No.

SYLVIA

I can't understand that. . . . I don't think you quite mean it.

MRS. VORONA

I *do* mean it.

SYLVIA

A great grief or a great joy brings a yearning from the soul: an indefinable, *spiritual* exaltation. Our happiness and our suffering have a divine quality. And we thrill with its power because a moment of eternity comes to us. God seems to be near us. . . . When we *love* He seems to look through the eyes of the loved one.

MRS. VORONA

Do you really believe that?

SYLVIA

I do. A mother touches very near to Heaven in the sleep that follows the torture of childbirth. She has looked at death and eternity and cried up to her Maker in her travail . . . and her prayer is answered in the dreamless rest that brings oh! such relief. . . . And she wakes to find the crown of her love close to her arms. . . . No other such glory is given to man or woman. . . . No emperor can know it. He may have the power of *death*. Woman brings *life*. . . . And from that power He has given woman comes the divin-

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ity in her nature. . . . Perhaps that has been denied you so far? . . . Have you children?

MRS. VORONA

No.

SYLVIA

Then you are seeking divinity, something so far missing in your life, through my son. . . . And he is touched with the divine pity for you.

MRS. VORONA

It may be *divine* or it may not—but he *does* pity me and he *loves* me. If you have taught him the Christ-like spirit, and have it yourself, you should be satisfied in knowing he is following it.

SYLVIA

I would be—if I knew he had it in *perfection*. Then I would have no fear. . . . But have you *tested* his pity for and his faith *in* you?

MRS. VORONA

Yes, I have.

SYLVIA

Completely?

MRS. VORONA

Do you think I'd be foolish enough to build my hopes on him and leave it to a hint from some creature like Saxon to throw me back to *this*?

SYLVIA

So you *have* told him?

MRS. VORONA

A good deal. . . . I'll tell him the rest—in time.

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SYLVIA

How have you told him? *How will* you tell him the rest?

MRS. VORONA

How?

SYLVIA

Have you done it *completely*? In order? Without extenuation? Have you told him in detail? In numbers? Three-four-five—and so on through the list of your *experiences*, without sparing yourself? Have you beat it into his brain that he is the *last* of a *number*? *Have* you? . . . Or did you cover it, and grace it and embroider it and weave a silken mesh of words around it? . . . Which have you done? . . . Which do you intend to do? . . . You don't answer.

MRS. VORONA

How merciless you *Christian* women can be!

SYLVIA

I don't want to be. Indeed I do not. . . . But I *do* want you to test my boy's faith in you. I want you to give a bare, truthful, unvarnished history of *facts*. . . . Are you *fair* enough, *brave* enough to do that? . . . There is a horrible nakedness about *facts—numbers*. . . . Have you done that? . . . Will you do it? . . . I see you *haven't*. I am afraid you *won't*. . . . Mrs. Vorona—no, don't turn away—listen to me. I'm in an agony of fear for Leonard. . . . I'm helpless against you. . . . I know that. . . . But *think*. I taught him to walk, to talk, to think, even to *love*. I've been *nineteen years* forming a *man*. . . . You've known him a

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few weeks. . . . You think he's been created by God and reared by me solely for your redemption. To take you out of the horror you have been living in. . . . My faith in him does not reach so far. Not quite so far. . . . To do *that* a man must have not only pity, charity and love but above all—*understanding*; all the divine qualities. Time and suffering only can give him *all* those. He hasn't them yet. And I'm frightened. . . . Tell him the *truth*. Please do. . . . I won't fight against the marriage then. . . . If, knowing *everything*, his knowledge strengthens his love, I'll give in. . . . The miracle will have happened. . . . Love will be greater than knowledge of sin. . . . I'll be reconciled. . . . Now that I have seen you, and listened to you I feel not only pity but a great yearning toward you—since I know it is my boy's *best* qualities that have attracted you. . . . I am pleading to you . . . I have no anger. No scorn. Only sorrow. Hope . . . and—affection.

MRS. VORONA

Affection?

SYLVIA

Yes. From the bottom of my heart I pity you.

MRS. VORONA

But you're a *believer*. A Christian! Doesn't your creed damn *us* eternally?

SYLVIA

Mine doesn't.

MRS. VORONA

Most creeds do. They hold out hope to the wicked *son* but a pit of flames to the wandering *daughter*.

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It's waiting for me. *That's* why I'm an unbeliever. . . . Do you think I believe *I'm* to be eternally tormented while the *Saxons* and their tribe sit tuning harps for all time? I don't. . . . And if I *did*—if I've no hope *after* this life then I'm going to take what I can *here*. Give me *faith* in *this* and I may find it for the *next*. . . . Leonard may give me that. . . . Affection! Pity! Why to you women are just good or bad. I'm *bad*, so down to the pit.

SYLVIA

That is not quite fair. . . . To some women goodness is an accident. They are loved and protected from the opportunity of mistakes. And they live respectably with undeserved credit for doing so. That kind of woman may be good because she's never had the *temptation* to be evil. . . . Another kind of woman sees the futility of viciousness. The hopeless future; the impotent and degraded old age. *She* chooses the better life because she knows it is *wiser*. She realizes that decency is rewarded even to the grave, and on through all the generations. She also sees clearly that the power to do evil through pleasure is taken from us long before life is spent. But our *loves* last till death. . . . Passion burns out. And *afterwards*? What?—A hopeless, child-less, remorseful old age stretches out barrenly to the end. . . . You were unfortunate. . . . I, too, might have been. But for my happy marriage I might have been *even worse*. . . .

MRS. VORONA

. . . Do you really think that?

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SYLVIA

Opportunity or necessity help to make us what we are. . . . There's not such a wide difference between women. The same humanity is in us all. Chance decides for us often. . . . It was kind to me. . . . My life has been filled. My love for my husband and his for me. My life has been complete. . . . Then my boy came. Everything a mother could wish her son to be he has been. He is part of me—greater than husband or self. . . . Send him back to me. . . . I beg of you. . . . If you love him——

MRS. VORONA

I do.

SYLVIA

Then put that love first. Protect him from himself. . . . Tell him everything.

MRS. VORONA

Suppose I do and he *still* loves me and stands by me?

SYLVIA

Then I'll give in. . . . You will have done what is right.

MRS. VORONA

. . . But if he turns from me in disgust? In loathing? . . . And you think he will. You are *sure* he will! Then what of *me*? . . . He is the only value in life to me now. . . . Every man until I met *him*, treated me as one of many. All of a kind. They've not valued *me*—*me*—*ME*! The something beyond the body. . . . He does. He brought me his love. I didn't seek it . . . and it's *mine*! . . . I'm going to hold it.

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SYLVIA

Very well. I give in. You're too strong for me. . . . But if pity for him and for me ever comes to you do the gentle, kindly, womanly thing. Tell him everything. . . . It will make you bigger and finer in his eyes in the years to come when he knows the sacrifice you made.

MRS. VORONA

We can both be happy without that sacrifice.

SYLVIA

My last plea: what future can you have together?

MRS. VORONA

We'll make it.

SYLVIA

He has no career as yet.

MRS. VORONA

We'll make that, too.

SYLVIA

You would cut him off from all he's loved from childhood?

MRS. VORONA

I'll take their place. Your husband filled your life. I'll fill his.

SYLVIA

That is your last word?

MRS. VORONA

It is. . . . And I warn you the more you try to part us the more he'll cling to me. I know him. . . . Try

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to take him away, he'll come back to me. Lock him up so that he can't see me and the moment he can escape he'll fly back to *me*.

SYLVIA

I don't want him that way. He would be all resentment against me. It would be no longer *home*. . . . No. I want him to leave you of his own free will or not at all. If he comes back, his infatuation for you gone, his home will have an added value. . . . And he *will* when he *knows*. . . . And some day he must know. . . . He'll turn from you then. . . . But it will be too late. He'll be——

[*The door at back opens and LEONARD looks in: he is excited and boyishly exhilarated: he stops abruptly when he sees his mother: then he goes quickly to MRS. VORONA.*]

LEONARD

Excuse me bursting in on you like this. I didn't know mother was here. [*Goes to his mother.*] So you couldn't wait for me to introduce you? You wanted to see Zeila. [*Proudly.*] Isn't she wonderful? [*Breathlessly.*] Wasn't I right? Although I didn't half do her justice, did I? [*Laughs boyishly.*] You didn't think I could possibly find anyone like her, did you?

SYLVIA

[*Faintly.*] No, Leonard, I didn't.

LEONARD

[*Going to MRS. VORONA.*] I knew she'd be surprised. I *wish* I'd been here to present you to each

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other. It was jolly of her to come all by herself. Wasn't it?

MRS. VORONA

Very.

LEONARD

The moment she—and father—heard about you—they wanted to see you at once.

MRS. VORONA

Will your father be just as enthusiastic—and—*jolly*?

LEONARD

More. He's a *man*.

MRS. VORONA

When shall I have the delight of meeting *him*?

LEONARD

Now. He's downstairs.

MRS. VORONA

Oh! *Is* he?

LEONARD

He worried me into bringing him. Do you mind?

MRS. VORONA

Mind? My dear boy, I'm sure it will be just as jolly as—*this* meeting has been.

[*Looking at SYLVIA.*]

LEONARD

He'll be wild about you—simply *wild*.

MRS. VORONA

Won't that be charming?

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LEONARD

And you'll be about him. Just as I can see you are about mother. He's an awful grouch at times, but he's really very good fun when it's all over . . . can make you laugh like anything when he wants to. May I bring him up?

MRS. VORONA

Do. Bring him up.

LEONARD

[*Rushing out.*] Thank you so much. I won't be a second.

MRS. VORONA

Does your husband know about me?

SYLVIA

No. He'd gone when Mr. Saxon called. He knows nothing.

MRS. VORONA

What an interesting family meeting it's going to be! Well, his profession will come in useful. He can cross-examine me. [*Bitterly.*] I hate lawyers. Inquisitive, insulting brutes!

[LEONARD *re-enters, breathlessly, showing in his father.*]

BROOKE

Well, Sylvia. I didn't expect to find you here.

SYLVIA

[*Faintly.*] I thought I'd come to meet you.

LEONARD

Zeila, this is my father. Father—this is Zeila.

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BROOKE

How do you do? [*He comes forward and they shake hands. MRS. VORONA, looking keenly at him, drops his hand and turns away deliberately. BROOKE, prepared to be enthusiastic through his son's preparation, is astonished at her appearance and chilled by her manner. He looks from her all round the room, his disapproval growing.*] So this is where your presents came from? [*Indicates screen and bowl.*]

LEONARD

[*Laughing gleefully.*] Rather! Isn't it a lovely room? . . . Aren't I lucky? I *know* I am. Here you all are. The three people who have done everything for me. . . . Zeila, what's the matter? [*He turns eagerly to his parents. BROOKE is looking coldly and disapprovingly at MRS. VORONA, who is growing angrier every moment under the scrutiny. SYLVIA has turned away to avoid LEONARD's eyes. LEONARD looks from one to the other: the happiness dies away as the realization grows upon him that all is not right. He looks long at SYLVIA.*] Mother! How long have you been here?

SYLVIA

Not long, dear!

LEONARD

What have you been talking about? [*With a forced laugh.*] I suppose you've been boring her about me. You always do if anyone will listen, don't you?

SYLVIA

Yes, I suppose I have been boring her.

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LEONARD

I knew it. Poor old mother! [*To Mrs. Vorona.*]
I've been her main topic. *Now, you're* going to be.

MRS. VORONA

I think I am. . . . Your mother doesn't quite approve of me.

LEONARD

[*Amazed.*] Not *approve*?

MRS. VORONA

I rather think your father doesn't, either. . . . I'm sure he hates my room. [*To Brooke.*] Don't you?

BROOKE

I've not said so.

MRS. VORONA

You've been looking at it as though it hurt you. . . . Leonard, in your mother's opinion I am not the kind of woman to make you happy.

LEONARD

[*Angrily turns on his mother.*] Why did you say that?

MRS. VORONA

She really came to ask me to send you back to your family.

LEONARD

[*Stunned: to Sylvia.*] *Did* you?

BROOKE

[*Grasping that something is very wrong.*] What is all this, Sylvia?

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LEONARD

Send me back? . . . Why? . . . What right have you to interfere?

BROOKE

Gently, my boy. If it comes to that we *both* have a right—if there's any occasion.

LEONARD

[*Hotly.*] No, you haven't.

BROOKE

[*Commandingly.*] Leonard! . . . [*To SYLVIA.*] What is wrong?

LEONARD

Yes—what is wrong? . . . Why don't you answer?

BROOKE

Come, dear.

SYLVIA

[*Caught between the two fires, glances at Mrs. VORONA and says quietly.*] Ask her.

LEONARD

We're asking *you*. . . Why did you come here at all without me? And then make a fuss? . . . It was a rotten thing to do.

BROOKE

Don't you speak to your mother——

LEONARD

[*Distractedly turns to Mrs. VORONA.*] What else did my mother say? [*To his mother.*] Why should you interfere? . . . Won't either of you speak? . . .

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I came in here quite happy. I thought you'd both be so proud of Zeila. [*Entreatingly to Mrs. Vorona.*] Please tell me what she said.

MRS. VORONA

Amongst other things, Leonard,—that I'm not good enough for you.

LEONARD

Not good enough! Why did you say that?

BROOKE

Really, it's very bewildering. This lady is entitled to some consideration, Sylvia.

LEONARD

[*To Mrs. Vorona.*] I'm sorry if mother said anything to hurt you. . . . [*To Sylvia.*] If *that* is why you came, it was a contemptible thing to do.

SYLVIA

[*In distress.*] Don't, Leonard. Don't.

BROOKE

Now look here, Leonard, if you dare to speak to your mother——

LEONARD

It *is* contemptible. To try and put doubts in Zeila's mind. I tell you, rather than leave her I'd never see either of you again. Never!

SYLVIA

[*Deeply hurt.*] Leonard! Don't say that. . . . Do as you please. Marry her if you wish but never

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say that to me again. . . . I don't quite deserve it.
[*To BROOKE.*] Come, dear.

[*She is now crying bitterly.*]

BROOKE

Wait. . . . Why aren't you in favour of this marriage? . . . Well?

SYLVIA

I don't want to say any more.

BROOKE

You must have some good reason for objecting.
What is it?

SYLVIA

That is all I am going to say now.

BROOKE

But Sylvia——

LEONARD

You've got to——

BROOKE

Be quiet.

MRS. VORONA

I'll tell you.

BROOKE

I wish you would be so good, Miss——

MRS. VORONA

Mrs. Vorona.

BROOKE

Mrs.?

MRS. VORONA

Yes. Didn't you know?

BROOKE

I did not.

[*Looks questioningly at his son.*]

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MRS. VORONA

Why, Leonard! Didn't you tell your father? . . .
Oh, yes. I've been married . . . and divorced.

BROOKE

Indeed?

[*Looks at her keenly then turns to LEONARD.*]

LEONARD

I told mother this morning.

BROOKE

You didn't tell me.

LEONARD

Well? What of it? A woman has a perfect right
to divorce a man who treats her shamefully.

BROOKE

But I——

MRS. VORONA

[*Cutting in.*] My husband treated *me* shamefully
. . . he *divorced* me.

BROOKE

What?

LEONARD

[*Aghast.*] Zeila! [*Then hurriedly.*] But you were
innocent? . . . Of course you were innocent?

MRS. VORONA

The jury didn't seem to think so. . . . My husband
won the case.

BROOKE

Then you defended it?

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MRS. VORONA

Oh dear, yes. For weeks.

BROOKE

[*Thinking.*] Vorona! [*Looking straight at her.*]
Vorona versus Vorona and Saxon?

MRS. VORONA

That's right.

BROOKE

I remember the case perfectly.

MRS. VORONA

You ought to. You were offered the defence by the
co-respondent's father.

BROOKE

I was.

MRS. VORONA

And you refused it.

BROOKE

I did. I detest such cases.

MRS. VORONA

[*Sneeringly, and angrily.*] Especially when an old
friend's son is involved!

BROOKE

There was no real defence. I went through the evi-
dence.

MRS. VORONA

It certainly looked bad for me, didn't it? *And* for
Ormonde.

BROOKE

[*Growing angrier and more disgusted every moment.*]
Yes, it did. You never should have defended it.

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LEONARD

Father.

MRS. VORONA

He's right, Leonard. We hadn't a chance. Had we?

BROOKE

[*Looking furiously at her.*] No.

MRS. VORONA

[*Looking straight at BROOKE; her one desire to hurt him.*] You're in old man Saxon's house now.

BROOKE

What? [*Right up to her; under his breath.*] You are living here with——?

MRS. VORONA

Ormonde? Yes. At least, I *was* until three weeks ago.

[*LEONARD stands dazed and horror-stricken.*]

BROOKE

[*Livid with rage, crosses to LEONARD.*] How dare you think of bringing such a woman into my family?

LEONARD

[*In blind fury.*] Don't you say a word against her.

BROOKE

From her own confession there is only *one* word you *can* use.

LEONARD

Don't say it! Don't say it!

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BROOKE

So this is the wife you have chosen! You came from a woman like that to your home! You even copy her garish stuff and sneak it into my house on the pretext that it is *artistic*! You young whelp!

SYLVIA

[Goes quickly between them, puts her arm protectingly round LEONARD, and cries distractedly.] Don't you call my son names. Don't blame him for this. If you didn't choose to tell him about life and he's made a mistake, don't turn round now and abuse him. *[To LEONARD hysterically.]* Leonard, you're perfectly free to do whatever you wish. Marry her if you like. Anything. Only don't ever say you never want to see me again. Don't say that. Don't think it. Because you're everything to me—everything.

[Completely breaks down and sits on sofa crying and sobbing.]

LEONARD

[Half-hysterically. Goes to his mother.] Don't mother, don't.

BROOKE

[Amazed at the fury of her outburst, changes his whole manner, goes to her to try to calm her, stands about her, his words come haltingly.] Sylvia! My dear! I was only thinking of you. Only of you! Oh, everything has suddenly become all wrong. Don't—don't let us quarrel. It's the first time you've ever spoken to me like this. Sylvia! Stop! Stop! I'll let him do anything he pleases. You're first with me.

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Leonard is with you. He can do anything, but you mustn't suffer. [*To LEONARD.*] Do what you please. Anything. [*To SYLVIA.*] There. [*All through this speech SYLVIA sobs between his sentences. Occasionally LEONARD tries to speak. Finally BROOKE puts his hand on SYLVIA's arm and pleads almost in a whisper.*] Come. Let us go. [*Both go up to door and look round at LEONARD, who turns away from them and looks at MRS. VORONA, bewildered by the rapidity of the emotional outbursts.*] Come, Leonard.

[*LEONARD does not move.*]

MRS. VORONA

Just a minute, Mrs. Brooke. [*To LEONARD.*] Don't turn away from your mother like that, Leonard. We've had a long talk about you. She's made me rather curious. Come here, Leonard. [*LEONARD goes to her.*] I wonder how deep is the faith of nineteen—your mother tells me you are only nineteen. [*LEONARD looks reproachfully at his mother.*] I want to tell you a few things about myself. You'll have to know them some time. You'd better hear them now.

SYLVIA

No. I didn't realize he cared so much that he could tell me he didn't want to see me again—I don't want to talk of this any more.

MRS. VORONA

I want to.

SYLVIA

Not now. I won't have Leonard tortured.

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MRS. VORONA

Yes, now.

SYLVIA

[*Taking her son by his arm: breathlessly:*] Come, Leonard.

MRS. VORONA

Leonard. [LEONARD releases himself from his mother's grasp and turns to MRS. VORONA.] I've been rather unlucky in my affections. In fact, very unlucky. . . . I began about your age . . . really a year younger . . . eighteen. . . . At eighteen I was impulsive, headstrong, impossible. I wanted more than anything to travel. As my parents couldn't take me I had to find others who would. So at the delicate age of eighteen I started wandering. . . . Some one had to pay the bills. I couldn't. So I made friends. One took me South, another East, a third through Central Europe. While in Italy with the fourth—or it may have been the sixth, I've really forgotten for the moment—I met Vorona in Rome. All the others seemed content to separate and go their own ways when we were mutually bored. He didn't. He insisted on marrying me—just as you do. So my wandering ended and I settled down . . . for a while. . . . It didn't last very long. . . . What happened after that you know. Since my divorce I've been living here. And in addition——

LEONARD

[*In agony.*] I don't want to hear any more. I don't want to hear it.

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MRS. VORONA

So you don't want to hear it? [*To SYLVIA.*] He can't even listen.

SYLVIA

Don't—don't.

MRS. VORONA

There mustn't be any misunderstanding. . . . I am in a self-revealing mood—I want you to know the real *me*. . . . Leonard, I've always put my best goods in the *window* for you. Now I feel like telling you of the stuff *inside*. . . . I have an appalling temper. A destructive one. . . . You mustn't take any notice of me when I'm like that. Let me alone until it's over. . . . It would be a good time to go to your mother and have a little quiet. . . . Ormonde always used to dash off at the first sign. . . . Outside of that I'm fairly agreeable—except that I'm jealous, capricious, extravagant and intensely selfish. . . . But you'll get used to those things. You're a dear boy and I know you'll make allowances. Personally I never do for anything or any one. . . . I insist on everyone putting me first and never expecting anything in return. . . . Whenever they didn't like it that way they could get out. . . . Of course when you're *married* it's somewhat different. . . . Still you'll always have your mother to go to. . . . Now you know the worst of me. . . . Beyond *that* I'm really rather likeable. Not quite as much as you think *me*—still likeable . . . and very expensive. . . . You will have to paint hard and often to keep me the way I'm accustomed to being *kept*. I can't bear to be de-

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prived of anything. It puts me into shocking tempers. . . . Still if you don't make enough, I daresay your father will come to our assistance—as Ormonde's did. . . . Now you know all about me. [To BROOKE.] And you. [To SYLVIA.] Are you satisfied?

SYLVIA

Are you? Look.

[LEONARD *has thrown himself into a chair, his hands over his eyes. As the cold, bitter, unemotional tone of MRS. VORONA's voice ceases he takes his hands slowly from his eyes and looks up. A change has taken place in him: he seems to have aged: to have passed in a few moments from boyhood to manhood: he rises unsteadily and stands looking at MRS. VORONA, his eyes glaring, his breath coming thickly.*]

LEONARD

So you have been just *amusing* yourself with me. . . . I couldn't make an animal suffer as you've made me. . . . A little while ago I was happy. I was a boy. . . . My parents were meeting the woman I worshipped. . . . I shall never know youth again. . . . I seem to have grown old. Quite old. . . . Why did you do it? . . . Why did you let me care for you if that is all the feeling you have for me?

MRS. VORONA

My dear boy, after all, you love me as I *am*. What does it matter what I *was*?

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LEONARD

Behind everything you said I heard the sneer, the gibe, the almost brazen glory in telling it. . . . It's on your face now. You're laughing at me! Laughing at me!

MRS. VORONA

Really, Leonard——

LEONARD

You *are!* You *are!* I heard the scoff in the measured, deliberate tones of your confession. Not a shred of regret. No shame. No sorrow. As though you were telling of some other woman. You seemed to take pleasure in hurting me; bruising me.

MRS. VORONA

Where was the use of mincing things? Embroidering them? Covering them in a silken mesh? I have given you *facts* and *numbers*. If we're going to spend our lives together you must know me intimately. I tried to be honest with you. To hide nothing.—I dare say I'll remember more when I've had time to look back carefully. . . . For instance—when I was in——

LEONARD

Don't! Don't!

MRS. VORONA

Well, of course; if you're going to make a fuss over a few little things——

LEONARD

Little things? Is *that* how you look at them?

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MRS. VORONA

How else should I? . . . As a matter of fact I hadn't thought about them for years. . . . You're very ungrateful. . . . Isn't he, Mrs. Brooke? I bare myself as I've never done for anyone and he *reproaches* me. . . . I'm disappointed in you, Leonard. Very disappointed.

LEONARD

Where is your gentleness and tenderness of yesterday?

MRS. VORONA

Yesterday I *felt* gentle. Just now I'm rather upset at all this questioning and shouting and crying. We're all so emotional. It would distract anyone. . . . So far you've taken me as you found me and we've been quite happy together. . . . To-morrow I may be in the most horrible rage. In fact, I feel it coming on now if your father continues to glare at me in that insulting way. . . . I don't like your father, Leonard. . . . We mustn't see much of him, unless he treats me courteously and considerately, as a woman in my position demands to be treated—as I know *you* will treat me.

LEONARD

[*Feebly beating one hand against his other.*] I pictured things so differently! So differently!

MRS. VORONA

You poor boy.

LEONARD

Boy! That's it! *That's* how you think of me now you know my real age. . . . You taunt me with my

ACT III: MANHOOD

youth. Yesterday you were proud of it. You thought I was twenty-three. You said youth was the only thing in life worth fighting to hold. Now you reproach me with it.

MRS. VORONA

Do you expect me to be always paying you compliments because you're younger than I am? . . . There may be times when I'll hate you for it.

LEONARD

I feel you've never loved me. I've just amused you.

MRS. VORONA

[*Laughing harshly.*] You're really very funny today.

LEONARD

Funny!

MRS. VORONA

Yes. In a boyish way. Sometimes I've liked it. Just now it's rather ludicrous. . . . I tell you a few little things——

LEONARD

Little again! Little!

MRS. VORONA

I'm afraid you don't know yourself yet, Leonard. At the sudden contact with knowledge—of a certain kind—you seem to ring hard. It frightens you. Disgusts you. . . . Vorona was very like that, too. . . . So we parted. . . . Take care, Leonard.

LEONARD

I don't seem to recognize you.

THE HARP OF LIFE

MRS. VORONA

I rather think you're repenting of your bargain. . . . Perhaps I am, too. . . . You annoy me to-day. Irritate me. . . . Suppose we both own up? Admit we've made a mistake? It isn't a very serious one. Nothing like as serious as some I've made. . . . I've got over them. I'll get over *this*. . . . And as youth is one long mistake, you'll soon get over it, too. . . . You've got a dear mother to go back to. . . . I don't envy you your father. . . . There. . . . No harm done. . . . At least very little. . . . Put all the blame on me. . . . Take it like a little man.

LEONARD

[*Moans.*] My heart is like lead. It hurts me. Hurts.

MRS. VORONA

I know that feeling. I've had it often. . . . Especially at night. . . . Then I've waked in the morning, had my coffee, glanced at the newspaper and found the world had been running around just the same quite regardless of me. . . . So I began all over again, regardless of it. . . . When you get to my age you'll find that's all life amounts to. Just a lot of beginnings-all-over-again.

LEONARD

[*Burying his face in his hands.*] You don't love me! You don't love me!

MRS. VORONA

You begin all over again, Leonard. [*Turns to SYLVIA.*] Take him back. . . . He's yours again.

ACT III: MANHOOD

SYLVIA

[*Looks at MRS. VORONA gratefully. She understands why MRS. VORONA has sacrificed her affection for LEONARD. She goes to her son and puts her arm around him. He is sobbing bitterly.*] Leonard! . . . Don't cry, Len.

LEONARD

[*Through his sobs.*] Oh, mother, she doesn't love me. She doesn't love me.

SYLVIA

[*Whispering to him, soothing him as though he were a child.*] Ssh! Ssh! . . . Don't do that. . . . Everything will be just the same. . . . I'll help you to forget it. . . . And you will.

LEONARD

She was laughing at me! Laughing at me!

SYLVIA

Ssh! Ssh! You came to me as a child when you were hurt. Now you're a man. . . . Come to me, Leonard—as a man.

LEONARD

[*In a whisper.*] Oh, mother, I'm so ashamed. Ashamed!

SYLVIA

Ssh! Ssh! You'll look at everything differently tomorrow. . . . All life is before you. . . . You're only in its morning. . . . Come, Leonard. Come home with your poor old mother.

THE HARP OF LIFE

LEONARD

[*Helplessly.*] Take me away. [*He rises: tries to throw off his shame and dejection.*] It's all over. Not going to cry any more. [*Trying to laugh.*] It's all right, old lady. Quite all right. . . . Let's go home. . . . [*Goes to door: stops: looks at Mrs. Vorona.*] May I see you again?

MRS. VORONA

When you've quite grown up. We'll have a good laugh together.

LEONARD

May I write to you?

MRS. VORONA

Good lord, no. I hate *reading* letters. And I never answer them.

LEONARD

[*Bitterly.*] You don't want to hear from me or see me?

MRS. VORONA

No. Ta-ta!

[*Turns away and walks across the room.*]

[*LEONARD goes out abruptly. SYLVIA turns to her husband.*]

SYLVIA

Marshall, I want you to say something to her—I want you to thank her.

BROOKE

Thank her? For what? Leonard has had a very lucky escape.

ACT III: MANHOOD

SYLVIA

Don't you know why she did that?

BROOKE

No. Why?

SYLVIA

Because I asked her to.

BROOKE

You asked her?

SYLVIA

Yes. She did that to send him back to us. And she has. I want you to speak to her, dear. Thank her.

BROOKE

[*Hesitates: then goes to Mrs. Vorona.*] Mrs. Vorona. [*She turns to him.*] I am extremely sorry for my rudeness to you. I was quite in the dark about things. I offer you my sincere apology. . . . Will you accept it?

MRS. VORONA

No.

BROOKE

I'm afraid it was too much to expect. At any rate, do please accept my gratitude—my sincerest gratitude—for your splendid generosity. It was fine of you. [Mrs. Vorona makes no sign. Brooke turns to Sylvia.] What more can I do? Put it right if you can, you wonderful woman.

[*Goes out.*]

SYLVIA

[*Looking gratefully at Mrs. Vorona.*] Thank you!

THE HARP OF LIFE

MRS. VORONA

So Leonard's gone. . . . Gone out of my life. . . . I always would upset things on a moment's impulse. . . . Your husband plunges me into temper, you into pity, and I throw over my one chance of happiness. . . . Well, it couldn't have lasted. . . . I suppose it's my punishment—to meet Leonard *now* instead of when I was *eighteen*. . . . Do you know why I gave him up?

SYLVIA

No.

MRS. VORONA

I don't know, myself. Unless it was that I saw *you* suffer more in this room than *I* have in my whole life. You made me very sorry for you. [*There is a pause. Then in a very angry tone.*] If that husband of yours had come instead of you I'd have stuck to Leonard, and I could have made him stick to me.

SYLVIA

I know that.

MRS. VORONA

What a mess you've made of your life! . . . With your looks and style and spirit, oh my, *what* a time you could have had! You might have been another Lady Hamilton—or a Nell Gwynne. Gone down into history with the best of us, instead of being chained up.

SYLVIA

Some women love their chains. I adore my husband. I worship my boy.

MRS. VORONA

Why, you've given all your young pretty years in the service of two male tyrants. You poor thing!

ACT III: MANHOOD

SYLVIA

And *your* young pretty years?

MRS. VORONA

At least no one owns me.

SYLVIA

How forlorn that must make you feel. Not to belong to *anyone*, but to *everyone*. To have the world at your command while you're still healthy and radiant, and only a paid servant at your bedside when you're ill. To have given your womanhood to man's pleasure and never to have known his tears. . . . The joy of making just *one* man *completely* yours. You poor thing. . . . My dear, it's no victory to hold a man for an hour, a day, a year. Many women of little talent or charm have done that. But, if after *twenty* years of married life a man still says: "You wonderful woman" . . . I think I have a little to brag about, don't you?

MRS. VORONA

You're a funny person. Leonard and you seem to pop out of each other all over the place. You're both children. [*Reflectively.*] Still, that's nothing against you. . . . After all, most of the great *mistresses* were very *feminine* and childlike.

SYLVIA

So are all great mothers.

MRS. VORONA

You've missed your vocation.

SYLVIA

[*Shaking her head.*] No. I've found it. [*Holds out her hand.*] God bless you!

THE HARP OF LIFE

MRS. VORONA

Do you think He will?

SYLVIA

Yes.

MRS. VORONA

[*Curiously.*] Why?

SYLVIA

Because He *does* understand.

MRS. VORONA

[*Takes her hand.*] That's nice of you. Take care of Leonard.

SYLVIA

I will.

[*Goes to door.*]

MRS. VORONA

[*To SYLVIA at door.*] Good-bye, Nell Gwynne.

[*SYLVIA turns in doorway, smiles back at Mrs. VORONA, and goes quietly out. Mrs. VORONA stands thinking a moment, gives a gesture as if trying to dismiss the whole thing, moves aimlessly to lounge. Slowly lies on it, and puts arms up above her head. She lies there staring into the past. Her future is now just a blur. She covers her eyes as though to shut out the hideous phantoms. A great, heart-broken sob escapes her. It is as the cry of a lost soul.*]

THE END OF THE PLAY

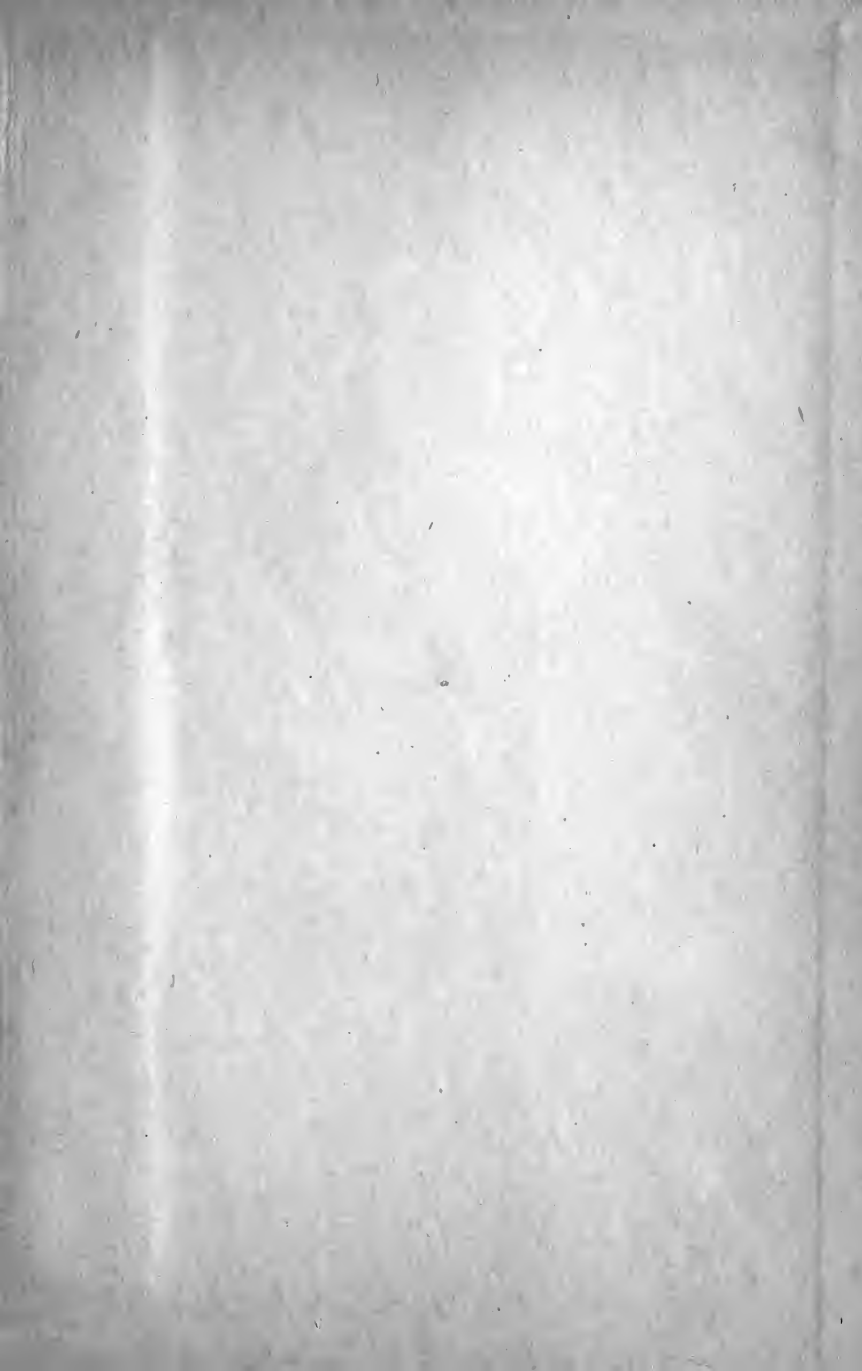


Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
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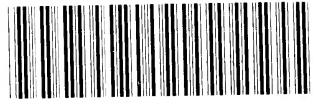
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